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FINAL BATTLEGROUND

By Donovan Clarke

It was in the summer of 194– that Stephen Rayne at last booked his passage to Germany, by then called the United States of Europe, with a capital at Vienna.

He sailed from Harwich to the Hook of Holland and then left the boat for a train to save time.

Approaching Germany from the north-west was no new experience for Stephen; it took him back to the early days of the war, when tactics had seemed only a question of immobilizing the grey armies of the Rhine, with a playful blasting of the Ruhr and the Baltic ports, as a sort of side-show for the volatile spirits of the air force.

As he sat quietly looking out of the window he could imagine once again the open sky slashed with flame—there, groups of yellow flashes where the big bombs were landing and, here, clusters of incendiaries, weaving their crazy patterns of dazzling white.

The absence of windmills was as yet the only sign that they had crossed the border, otherwise the landscape was flat and hatched with canals. Leaving Hanover the train passed into the fertile old kingdom of Westphalia, and crossing the bridge of the Weser, went thundering on through the Streusand Buchse, the forest of pines planted by Frederick the Great in an attempt to turn to some profitable use that barren, sandy soil.

And still Stephen sat looking out of the window, as though the flying landscape were in some way the theme of his thoughts.

Was it a fool's errand that he was on, after all? What would they really be like, these Webers?

He knocked out his pipe with deliberation and took out his pocket-book. Extracting an old photograph, thumbed at the edges, he looked at it once again. He knew it all by heart—the middle-aged man, the woman and the four young men in German uniforms. Herr Doktor was smiling at Frau Weber, while the latter was looking at her airman son. In the background was a garden, with a stretch of lawn and rosebushes along the curve of a path.

Stephen glanced away at the rushing country-side, again. Here he was, coming to the woman whose favourite son he had killed, when they were both boys, five years ago; and who had been a symbol in his mind for—he hardly knew what. In some sort of way he felt he was offering himself to her as a satisfaction. The result did not rest upon him—she was the real protagonist in this drama of human capacity. What did he expect of her?

His reverie was broken by the passage of the guard along the corridor—"Doberitz!"

Already part of Berlin. The barracks flashed past—with the pavilions once used to house the visiting Olympic champions—now a mass of broken concrete and twisted iron. Next Schreber Garten, with its little plots and its sunshelters and sheds, full of families out for the week-end. Then real houses, the streets of what had been a good middle-class suburb, though now it was rather badly smashed about.

Looking ahead as they crossed a viaduct and swung around over a rise, Stephen saw Berlin; and out eastward beyond, a haze of industrial suburbs; probably still largely in ruins, he thought. At last Anhalter Bahnhof, and the curious homeliness of the great semi-cylindrical glass roofs, fretted with iron girders like a vast conservatory. The old-fashioned, solid, square, box-like building of the eighties of the last century, with its huge half-circular exit, however, had given place to a modern structure in glass and Prestite.

Stephen took a taxi to the Adlon unter Linden, and found himself driving down a still magnificent, though battered, thoroughfare which reminded him, in its grandeur, of the Champs Elysées. At the far end was the Brandenburger Tor, like another and grimmer Arc de Triomphe. He had taken the precaution of writing to Frau Weber to announce his arrival, asking her to address him at his hotel, and sure enough when he arrived, there was a letter waiting for him in the same handwriting as five years before.

Dear Mr. Rayne,

So you have come as I hoped you would. I am free tomorrow afternoon and I suggest we meet somewhere in the city. Perhaps you will ring me when you have settled in your room?—Garten 648.

I would ask you to come out here but in the circumstances I think it would be wiser not. My husband is a little peculiar since the war. We lost our four boys and he has not recovered. I have not told him you are in Berlin as I did not want to upset him—it is better for him to forget the past if he can.

Stephen felt an acute disappointment. He had counted on visiting Frau Weber in her home, on meeting her in the atmosphere in which she habitually moved. The meeting was bound to be difficult in any case—in the formal surroundings of an hotel it would be impossible. He would ring her and tell her as much. When he had been shown to a room he dialled Garten 648.

A woman's voice answered from the other end. "Yes . . ." It was Frau Weber speaking. Was that Mr. Rayne? Yes . . . she could understand him perfectly. She was sorry not to be able to ask him out—but didn't he think it was wiser to meet in the city? With some

difficulty Stephen told her how he felt. Wouldn't it be possible for him to come, unknown to Herr Doktor? Frau Weber hesitated but finally decided that as her husband had an appointment tomorrow afternoon, Stephen might come at 3.30. He could catch the Tiergarten bus in Friederich Strasse and ask to be put off at Alle Hofmann. They lived on the corner of the street at the bus stop. The name of the house was Rosen Garten.

Punctually at the appointed time, Stephen alighted at the Alle Hofmann and made his way up a gravelled path to a surprisingly modern house. He reminded himself that German architecture had always been advanced. The house was built largely of glass, the whole disconcertingly at variance with the English lay-out of the garden, with its standard roses and formal flowerbeds.

He knocked at the steel-framed door. Outwardly, he was calm enough, but his heart was in his mouth and his pulse raced like mad. It was no light thing he was doing—but having done this, he might know peace of mind again. Whatever was going to happen, he felt, would direct his life in the future.

A little lady with grey hair and sharp, twinkling eyes opened the door to him. Yes: it was Stan's face all right.

"Come this way, Mr. Rayne", she said in precise English. "The sun is beautiful at the back of the house. Leave your hat there on the hall table."

She led the way through the hall. "What a blessing social necessities are, in circumstances such as ours." She looked at him quietly, turning over her shoulder in a bird-like movement at once unpremeditated and controlled.

"She moves like a dancer", thought Stephen, and noticed her small, perfectly poised head and her compact carriage.

They passed through a living room packed chock-full of heavily carved walnut furniture. A house of contrasts indeed, he thought—the expression of a personality moving equally in the new world of glass and the old world of heirlooms and nineteenth century gardens. Along one wall was a rack of antique firearms. They reached the back of the house and he found himself in a sun-room with low divans and cushions and wide windowsills, scattered with magazines—among which he noticed the "New Yorker". There was another rack of firearms. Noticing Stephen's interest in them, Frau Weber said "They are my husband's. He has made firearms his hobby, and he is, I believe, quite an authority on their evolution".

Motioning him to a seat she sat down herself and rang for a maid to bring tea.

"And now, Mr. Rayne, we have so much to say to each other that I think we will begin as soon as Freda has brought the tea. My husband will not be back for some time. This is your first visit to Berlin, is it not?"

"Yes."

"I won't ask you what you think of it—that is so futile, isn't it?"

"I have already seen enough", said Stephen, "to admire the genius for rebuilding which you Berliners possess."

"Ah, Mr. Rayne, we are used to it. It is true this is the first time we have had to rebuild our streets, but we have had much practice in rebuilding our institutions during the last fifty years. But here is Freda. Thank you, my child; put the cakes on the little table, will you? And let me know the moment Herr Doktor returns home."

"Yes, madam."

"And now, Mr. Rayne", continued Frau Weber, arranging the tea tray, "tell me all about yourself. Do you take milk or will you have your tea *à la Russe*?"

"Milk please."

"Ah, how English that sounds."

"Tell me, Frau Weber", said Stephen, "how do you come to speak such excellent English?"

Frau Weber laughed deprecatingly—and stopped suddenly.

"Thank you, Mr. Rayne", she said. "I was afraid my accent might have changed for the worse. Well, you see I am English by birth. My husband was one of your Rhodes scholars and he too speaks excellent English."

"I see. What does Herr Doktor do, may I ask?"

"He is professor of philosophy at the University, though he does very little lecturing now, because of his health."

The subject seemed to depress her and she dismissed it.

"But it is you", she said, handing him a cup of tea, "I want to know about. Do tell me about yourself."

"I'm going to", said Stephen, "but it won't be easy, Frau Weber."

Frau Weber looked at him, and a veil of sadness overcame her face, lending it a touching dignity.

"Mr. Rayne", she said, "Don't imagine I do not realise what it means to both of us." She got up and went to a writing desk and picking up a letter, she handed it to him.

He glanced at it. It was his own letter to her, written during the war. As he read it the phrases seemed to echo in his mind. It was his own wording and yet not his.

"It's your son. I know you can't forgive me, for I killed him. But I want you to know he didn't suffer—the end came quickly. He

had your picture in his pocket and both you and he remind me of one whom I have lost just as you have lost him. I didn't think of him or of you when we shot at his machine; he was just an enemy spying out our men and I couldn't let him get back to tell the news. Indeed it was either him or us. I know you must have loved him—just as I loved my friend.

"War isn't fair on you women. God, how I wish it were over. I felt when I touched your boy he might wake up again and we should be friends. I have had him buried near where he fell and where I met him; and I will take care of him while I live. My friend's body was burned and I can never see his grave. After the war you may want to take your boy home again."

Stephen gave the letter back to her and she took it, saying "I shall always keep it".

"I have yours too", said Stephen, and he took it from his pocket. "I know it by heart, I think." And he began to speak it, holding the letter in his hand without looking at it.

" 'There is nothing to forgive. I see you as you are in your troubled goodness. I feel you coming to me like a little boy astonished at having done ill, when you meant to do so well. He was my youngest. To women war is a reality indeed, for all men are our sons, if only we were great enough to realise it. Yet perhaps women more than men are to blame for this war. We did not think of the world's children as our own children. The baby hands that clutched at our breasts were so sweet, we forgot the hundred other baby hands that stretched out to us. And now my heart aches with repentance—for your friend and all like you. When the war is over, come to me. I shall be waiting for you.' "

Frau Weber was crying quietly. Stephen put the letter down on the table and went up to her, feeling, as she said, like a little boy. "Frau Weber", he said, taking a photo from his wallet, "I've kept this photo—I hope you will forgive me that too?"

"Oh", she said, drying her eyes, "what a foolish old woman I am."

She took the photograph and looked at it. "Yes", she said, "I remember it. You would have liked Georges, Stephen. I may call you that?"

"Of course you may", said Stephen gently. He took out a cigarette and offered her one. She smiled and shook her head.

"No, thank you. We forgot such habits during the war and I for one have decided not to learn again. Tell me, Stephen, how did you come to . . . meet . . . Georges?"

"I suppose I'll have to tell you all about it", he said, "because I do want you to understand how I feel. Well, we were coming back at dawn, having bombed Williamshaven. Our machine was badly shot about by anti-aircraft fire and the wireless was out of commission. There was a heavy mist over the Channel and the whole of the south counties were fogbound. I decided not to attempt a landing, because the barometric reading had most probably altered, and that, you see", he said, "affects the accuracy of the alt-meter; so that I couldn't tell exactly what our altitude might be. By dead reckoning I guessed we were over Sussex. The rear gunner reported that an M.E.109 was approaching from behind. I immediately dived almost to the fog level, still flying north, to prevent his getting under my tail. It was Georges. He came on in a dive, firing on our rear gunner, who, on his part, held his fire till Georges was almost on us; then, as he turned, he raked him."

Stephen paused the merest instant—but Frau Weber was looking out of the window, and he hurried on.

"Georges went up in a zoom and stalled and began to fall, smoke pouring from his engines as he baled out. Unless you've seen action like this, above the clouds, you have no idea of the eeriness of it. It's surprisingly peaceful looking at someone baling out in the distance."

"He was wounded when he baled out?" Frau Weber asked.

Stephen nodded his head. "He must have been, of course. He must have lost consciousness coming down—perhaps just as he entered the fog." He paused.

"And how did you come to find him?" she asked.

"It was almost as though *he* found me", he replied. "You see, my petrol gave out immediately afterwards, and we had to bale out too. I had to circle about while my gunner and observer went, and then I went myself on the last time round. I must have been right over where he was, and as there was no wind, I came right down beside him. As soon as I saw him I felt as if I had been waiting to meet him all along. He was the dead image of Stan Pryde."

"Your friend?"

Stephen nodded. "It was Stan's death which started everything—I didn't discover why I was alive till then."

"What do you mean, Stephen?"

"It's difficult to explain", he said, "but I hoped you might understand. You see, Stan Pryde was my greatest friend, and his death hit me hard. Then, when your son was so like Stan, it brought home to me how futile life had become. From that point I had to begin to

construct something worth believing in—I felt I wanted to strip off all illusions. Somehow, one of the greatest illustions seemed to be the passage of Time—because, I suppose, the past seemed so much more real than the present. Stan influenced me much more in memory than he did when living—and the further back in the past I imagined myself, the nearer I seemed to be to your son. You will probably think it very foolish of me", he continued, "but I have a distinct feeling, however it may be explained, that I have been here before. I noticed it, I remember now, coming up the garden path, and in the living room as I passed through it. I seem to have been in such a room before—with furniture just like that."

"You believe in re-incarnation?"

"No . . . I believe we have the power to know our future, though, and that means that if we take thought we may be able to influence that future before it arrives."

"How can we know our future?" asked Frau Weber.

"Not at once in our conscious mind, but often enough unconsciously; and sometimes the knowledge seeps through to our consciousness. Our mind is a regressive series of observers. There is the 'I' that thinks I am standing here and the 'I' that knows 'I' am thinking I am standing here, and so on *ad infinitum.*"

"When I was a little boy I used to hypnotise myself by looking at a packet of John Bull oats. You remember, maybe, there was a picture of John Bull on the packet, holding up a packet of John Bull oats on which there was another John Bull holding up a packet in his turn, and so on without end. Millions of John Bulls. We are all like a packet of John Bull oats, for we are each a series of observers existing in a series of times—and each observer is further removed from actuality, or what we call actuality, than the last one."

"I'm afraid I don't follow, Stephen."

"Frau Weber", he said, leaning forward, "I believe it would be possible for a number of people, working together, to change the past."

Frau Weber shook her head. "Everybody who lives has wished to put the clock back, but no one has succeeded."

"Oh, there are ways", said Stephen.

"Well, perhaps there is one way", admitted Frau Weber. "Excuse me a moment"—and she left the room. A moment later she returned, holding in her hand a small leatherbound volume.

"There's a quotation here I want to show you", she said. "Do you know Dante?"

"Well, I once did read his Divine Comedy in a translation."

"It's in the fifth canto of the Purgatorio", she said, turning the leaves. "Dante is supposed to have killed Buonconte in battle in an honourable cause—when they were both young men. Years later he put Buonconte in his poem in order to give him some recompense. Dante must many times in the intervening years have recalled that battle of his youth, recalled it not indeed with real remorse, but with compassionate regret. And thus he thought of rewarding his noble victim and of saving his soul, at least in the poem and in imagination, in order to make amends. Here it is—this is what Dante said to Buonconte when he met him in the underworld:

E io a lui: Qual forza o qual venture
ti tranio si fuor di Campaldino,
che non si seppi mai tua sepultura?"

And she translated it for him: "And I said to him: 'What violence or what chance carried you so far from Campaldino that your burial place was never found?' "

"Don't you see?" she continued, "in that question is summed up all the vain search of the field of battle and around it, which Dante made, for the body of Buonconte; and perhaps that question revealed to Buonconte just who it was had given him the stab in the throat. At the end of the canto", she added, turning over the page, "it closes with the gentle prayer of Pice—a funeral oration, as it were, over the slain and pronounced by the slayer."

"It's a minor miracle", said Stephen, in a quiet, excited voice. "I am not a believer in destiny exactly; I follow no star, nor do voices speak to me—I live like most men in a perfect muddle. But I have noticed again and again that whenever I am waiting for the illumination of an idea something happens which brings it to me."

"We all find that, I think", said Frau Weber.

"You see", he continued earnestly, "Dante's act is a perfect expression of the sort of thing I wish to do. There was an incident in his past life which he wanted, not to undo—we cannot do that—but to fulfil and in a sense to change; and you see how he did it. He conferred immortality on Buonconte in order to meet him. He was a Christian and so he chose a Christian conception within which to do so. I feel it may be possible to do so in another way."

"But not an actual way", said Frau Weber quietly.

"Who knows that the path of imagination is not an actual way", he said. "Perhaps it is along that track one can best reach the past. For the past is still living, you know."

The maid Freda came to the door and stood waiting.

"It is Herr Doktor", she said hurriedly.

Frau Weber rose. "Thank you, Freda", she said. "I'll come to him in a minute." The maid disappeared.

She turned to Stephen. "I ought to ask him to come in", she said. Stephen nodded.

"Who shall I tell him you are?" she added quickly.

"Say I'm a friend of Georges."

"He may remember your name—he has seen your letter, though that was long ago."

"Well, say my name is Pryde."

"It might help him to talk about it all. Do you think you could?"

"Of course", said Stephen. "I hope I can help."

Frau Weber left the room and returned a moment later with her hand on her husband's arm.

"This is Mr. Pryde, Hermann. He was a friend of Georges, my dear."

The doctor advanced to Stephen and stopping a pace away from him said: "You have been a long time coming, Mr. Rayne—but now you are here, I am very glad to meet you."

"Mr. Pryde, dear", said Frau Weber, a little too calmly.

"It is unnecessary to lie to me, Anna", said the professor gently. "I saw Mr. Rayne's name in his hat as I came through the hall."

There was an ominous silence. Stephen and Frau Weber exchanged glances.

"I wanted to save you the shock, my dear."

"I am capable of sustaining the shock as you are, Anna, although you had the advantage of being forewarned."

It was not a reproof—merely a statement.

He was a big man, iron-grey at the temples, and stooped with study, but virile in appearance. His eyes were the striking feature of his face. They were blue and sunk deep in his head, but they shot forth a mental power which was uncanny. His voice was full toned and heavy, with imperceptible nuances of inflection which were to be felt rather than directly heard.

"I'm sorry my wife didn't tell me you were coming", the professor said, "but in any case I couldn't have been here this afternoon. I had an appointment with my lawyer. As a matter of fact, strangely enough, I've been changing my will."

"Oh", said Stephen, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes. I put it off as long as I could—you know how one does."

Stephen was decidedly uncomfortable, while Frau Weber was strangely quiet. She kept looking at her husband. He for his part seemed thoroughly sure of himself.

"Frau Weber tells me you are a keen collector of old firearms", said Stephen, making a random and, he felt, floundering attempt at conversation.

A smile crossed the professor's face.

"Would you care to have a look at them?" asked the professor nonchalantly. He walked over to the rack of pistols and revolvers which was on the wall, and selecting a revolver he said, "This is a beautiful little instrument. The action is perfect. It is a pre-war model. Perhaps you would care for a shot with it?"

"Not now, Hermann", said Frau Weber hurriedly.

"You are a good marksman, I have no doubt", said the professor, ignoring his wife.

Stephen caught Frau Weber's eye. It would be better to humour him.

"Yes, I'd like to have a shot", said Stephen.

The professor smiled again. "Just a moment. I'll get some cartridges"—and he left the room.

Frau Weber came across to Stephen quickly. "You can get out by the back", she said.

"No", said Stephen, "I'm not going. He might turn on you."

"Please", she said, "it's foolish to defy danger. My husband is not responsible for all his acts. For his sake, go."

Stephen hesitated. The professor could be heard approaching through the living room. It was already too late. He was standing at the door.

"Come on", he said, "while the light is still good."

Frau Weber went towards the door and Stephen followed her.

"There is no need for you come, Anna", said the professor. "I know you don't like it." He turned to Stephen. "My wife is very highly strung, Mr. Rayne", he said. "Firearms frighten her, and I am afraid my hobby does not meet with her approval. I try not to obtrude it on her."

Frau Weber said nothing, but having reached her husband's side, she walked on between the two men. At the end of the path in the back garden there was erected a target which bore the marks of many bullet holes. The professor turned, loaded the revolver and handed it to Stephen, then turned again to his wife. "Why don't you go in, Anna?" he said gently. "It will only upset you."

"I prefer to stay, please, Hermann", she replied.

"Ten kilometres", he said—and led Stephen to a pipe-clayed line across the path.

Stephen felt an unreasonable desire to laugh. Was the professor really mad or just terribly sane? Did he intend to shoot him? If so, why give him the revolver? Apparently he was mad and perhaps harmless. Stephen raised the revolver and took aim. He was a little out of practice, but he got two bulls and three outers. Herr Weber loaded the revolver again without a word and fired himself. Four bulls and an inner.

"Good", said Stephen. "You must be in practice."

"Every day", said the professor. "Every day for nearly five years."

Loading again, he asked, without looking up, "What do you propose to do in the future, Mr. Rayne?"

"I'm returning to England to buy a small cottage."

"Farm?"

"Oh, no! I shall just live quietly for a time and think."

The professor nodded his head gravely; there was just the slightest hint of irony in his voice as he asked: "You are fond of speculation, Mr. Rayne?" Stephen nodded.

"So am I", said the professor, taking aim. Four more bulls.

A smile came over the marksman's face. "And what will be the subject of your speculations, Mr. Rayne?" he asked.

"Time", said Stephen.

"Ah", commented the professor, not turning a hair. "A pregnant subject, certainly."

Stephen felt he was quizzing him. Did he think it was pretentious? "It will be a new adventure for me", he added.

"Indeed", said the professor, taking aim again. Five bulls this time. "Time and eternity", said the professor musingly. "What about eternity, Mr. Rayne? That would be the greatest adventure of all, would it not?"

"Probably", said Stephen.

"My last for today", said the professor, loading again. He filled the chamber and took aim. There were three shots. The professor lowered the revolver. There was a click. He examined the chamber.

"What's the matter?" asked Frau Weber, approaching him.

"It's jammed, my dear, strangely enough", he said, nonchalantly.

"Let me have it, Hermann", she said.

"Don't be silly, my dear", he replied curtly. "You know I never let you play with firearms. It's dangerous for women."

"May I see it a moment, professor?" asked Stephen quietly.

The professor's eyes taunted him.

"By all means, Mr. Rayne", he said after a slight pause.

Stephen took the revolver and examined the safety-catch. He had expected to find it on, but it was not. It was, after all, too obvious a trick. The professor watched him closely and the slightest smile played about his mouth. Stephen sensed it without actually seeing it. He raised the revolver and tried to fire. The trigger refused to budge. Feeling excessively foolish, he looked at the older man.

"You're right", he said. "It's jammed."

The professor held out his hand and took the revolver with a smile.

"We'll go inside, Mr. Rayne", he said.

All three returned to the house.

Frau Weber caught Stephen's eye.

"Do please go quickly!" her glance seemed to say.

Stephen nodded imperceptibly. He felt confused and guilty over the revolver, and the professor was beginning to annoy him. He mustn't let the man spoil his pilgrimage.

"I must be going", he said aloud. "I've an appointment at six o'clock."

"Well, time is getting on", said the professor.

He dwelt on the noun, deliberately was it? Stephen turned to Frau Weber to say good-bye. He held out his hand.

"I'm coming to the gate", she said in level tones. The professor said nothing, but led the way. "You must come again, Mr. Rayne, if you can manage it", he said. Once again, it seemed to Stephen, a subtle nuance crept into his remark. He disregarded it.

"Here's your hat", said the professor at the front door. "I wish you luck on your adventure." Stephen looked him in the eyes; the man certainly was queer. His eyes did not flinch—he regarded Stephen with detachment.

"Thank you, professor", Stephen said They shook hands. Stephen turned to Frau Weber.

"Thank you so much", he said, "for all you've done for me. I do hope I can come again, but I will write to you in any case."

"Oh", he continued, suddenly recollecting. "I've left your letter on the table."

Frau Weber hesitated and then turned to her husband.

"Would you get it, my dear?" she asked. "It's on the round table in the sun-room."

"Certainly, dear", said the professor with alacrity. He went inside and, after a moment or two, returned without it.

"I can't find it, Anna; you'll have to look for it."

Frau Weber paused, and then, as if coming to a decision, she left the verandah. The letter was there, all right, plainly visible on the table. With a spasm of fear, Frau Weber grabbed it and, not daring to think, sped to the front door.

Just as she reached the threshold the shot rang out and Stephen staggered and fell. She ran past her husband and reached Stephen.

The shot was still ringing in his mind, and he saw her face as from a distance, as though he was being conveyed rapidly away. Already he was among clouds, once again in his machine—he and Georges Weber, manœuvring for position over Sussex. Now Stan was with them—all three of them swaying gently from their parachutes, down over a soft sea of cloud convolutions. They would continue falling for ever. For ever Georges and he would be lying there on the ground wrapped in the fog—and always he would be walking up this garden path and entering this living room. For ever this shot would ring faintly in his mind.

Frau Weber got up. She was crying quietly. Her husband had finished his revolver practice.

RAMU VALLEY

Furred jade and velvety brown, the slopes of the hills
Roll back from the bright green flats of the kunaied valley,
Rising to jungled heights whose viridian darkness
Strikes at the blue-hazed peaks in the hollow distance,
With their milky scarves of cloud afloat in the turquoise.

Now is the valley's agelong silence invaded
By roar of the Douglases, thunder of 25-pounders,
Machine-guns crackling, and echoes of rifle shots
From the forward battalions, eyried on mountain tops,
Linked to the world by the lines of native carriers.

Over a thousand feet the weary patrols
Climb to their shelters, churning the gaiter-deep mud,
Sleeping sodden from nightly punctual rains.
And at dawn a platoon charges a height with bayonets,
Spitting the Japs entrenched in their foxholed ridge.

Grim is the fight in these far New Guinea mountains,
Where the infantry labour and climb, sweating and cursing,
Hazard the waiting death, kill, and endure.
These are the men to reward when the peace is won;
And our honour is lost if the Ramu is not remembered.

New Guinea, October, 1943. T. Inglis Moore.

POETS AND WORLD ORDERS

By A. J. A. Waldock

If modern scholarship is sure of one thing it is that criticism must be "historical". We can never really know a writer, it says, until we know his time: only when we have done our utmost to think as his age thought, to feel as his age felt, are we entitled to think that we know what *he* thought and felt: only then can we venture an estimate of the true significance of his work.

This is a great change, and a good one, since the bad old days when anybody felt perfectly free to extract whatever meaning seemed to him appropriate from Shakespeare or anybody else.

Yet there is another side to it, and it may be that the time has come when the brake needs to be put on the free momentum of "historical" criticism. Observe, at any rate, what often happens to a writer when he is caught up and handled "historically". Observe, for example, what happens to Shakespeare when Theodore Spencer* takes him and relates him to the Elizabethan world order.

Spencer explains the characteristics of this world order. It was a time when men had a remarkable sense of the unity of all things—when cosmos, state and individual were felt as vitally interrelated, so that damage done to the second or third of these could affect the first. It was a time when man himself was felt with remarkable intensity as standing in a middle, critical position in the hierarchy of nature, with angels above him and animals below. And it was a time when the old securities of thought were being challenged: the "Renaissance conflict" had arisen between the sense of man's greatness and the sense of his littleness, the sense of what he might be and the sense of what he so often was.

This, roughly, was the world outlook behind Shakespeare. With the assistance of this world outlook he formed his own view of life and wrote his plays.

It is now that a curious image emerges, as the "historical" Shakespeare begins to take shape in Spencer's pages. The image is like this.

Shakespeare, having gone through his initial period of experiment and practice, gets really down to business. He rolls up his sleeves and with the world order vigorously co-operating in the background bends the full force of his mind on Life. With his mind gradually working up to full pitch he broods intently on its meaning. And then this sudden, startling Truth emerges, which he quickly pounces on and embodies in a play. Indeed, from now on he will never give up

* *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man.*

embodying it, for it is the great Shakespearean discovery (only made possible, however, by the co-operation of the Elizabethan world order and the Renaissance conflict). From now on it will be the great Shakespearean theme. It is this: appearance is sometimes not quite the same as reality. In play after play Shakespeare hammers this in, and—Spencer is not tired of insisting on the point—*only* the presence of the Renaissance conflict in the background made the full efflorescence of this theme possible.

But as Shakespeare goes on a curious thing happens: a change comes over him. One day (this was the second turning-point of his career: the first was when he began to think really furiously) he jumped up and banged his fist on the table and said to himself: "I've been wrong all along." He was still sure that appearance and reality were not the same; nothing would prise him loose from that principle; but *he had had them the wrong way round all the time.* He had thought that it was the evil that appeared good; nothing of the kind; it was the good that appeared, quite superficially and falsely, as evil.

So, gladdened in his heart and doubly cheered at having got it straight in his own mind at last, he began again and wrote the Romances, in which he corrected what he had previously committed himself to while under that false impression.

(Spencer points out that if we look closely we shall see that even in his tragic period—when he had things back to front or upside-down—Shakespeare was within an ace, once or twice, of hitting the truth. For example, there is that long passage in *Macbeth* in which Malcolm makes himself out to be utterly vile—the passage that producers have ever with one accord unceremoniously pitched out of the play. Boring it may be, says Spencer, but the full significance of the drama cannot be taken without it, for it gives us a glimpse of the very truth that Shakespeare was to expound in his last plays. For here—reversing the usual situation in *Macbeth*—"instead of the appearance being good and the reality evil, it is the other way around". Shakespeare, in short, had almost got it.)

Besides this basic discovery, giving as it were the ground-plan and pattern of his work, Shakespeare made other discoveries in passing, which receive their embodiments in particular plays or series of plays.

For example, feeling himself in the mood for really effective thinking, he gets set again: lets his mind gradually work up and race without restraint (all the time, of course, the world order co-operating and supercharging, so to speak, the processes of his individual brain) and then: out comes another Truth. This time it is a discovery about kings. Kings, underneath the regal trappings, the ceremony and so

forth, are quite often *hardly distinguishable from real men.* (Appearance and reality again!) Say what you like, Henry IV, Henry V and Richard II *did* have emotions that we can all understand and even to some extent share; and Shakespeare, without losing more time than he can help, writes four plays straight off to prove it.

Once more he gets set: once more the intent scrutiny of life: once more a Truth. When you have received a really shattering disappointment (have been utterly disillusioned, for example, about some person you thought very highly of) you are likely to take the drastic step of passing *from the particular to the general.* That is to say, you may grow slightly pessimistic in your outlook, you may even come to take a gloomy view of life as a whole. Once more Shakespeare writes a play to show that this phenomenon can really occur—*Hamlet* —and once more (Spencer still insists on the point) only the intensive co-operation of the Elizabethan world order (one of whose specialties was precisely this faculty to pass from particular to general) made the achievement possible.

Such is Shakespeare viewed in the light of his world order. The effect (surely) is to leave us a little astonished, wondering where the Shakespeare we used to know could have slipped away to, and what, in any case, all the fuss over him could have been about. Spencer, to be fair, warns us that such a study as his must leave out *something* of the Shakespeare who matters. Perhaps the time has come when, in the interests of balance and the due proportions of things, we should remind ourselves just how much the study of world orders and the debts that writers owe to them *can* leave out.

PAINTER OF ANTWERP

Plod homeward, peasant, north-bound from Italy
With head full of slow wonder, pondering
On frescoes at Venice and all the odd adventures—
The bear in the way, the painter at Padua
In a great plumed hat, full of queer notions,
Ships in the harbour at Naples with a new rigging—
Strangeness enough to empty many tankards.

Plod homeward, Breughel, Painter of Antwerp.

At the top of the Alps he paused perhaps, looked backwards,
Rejecting the fanciful, and took for a painting
Ploughman, fisherman, and moon-faced shepherd,
The furrow cut cleanly, the sheep contented;
Put thumb to nose with neither pride nor envy
At soaring wings—a Southerner's invention—
Icarus sprawling, two feet out of the sea.

ROSEMARY DOBSON.

THE POWER OF THE BELLS

An unpublished poem by Shaw Neilson.

The [great?] bells grow not weary,
They call unto prayer;
They defeat well the Dark One
In the holy air.

With the reposing raiment
Of the fallen sun
Softly they still discourage
The Evil One:

The Bat, the deep-fallen
Who craves mankind,
Who puts out his evil on
The opening mind.

The sweet bells persuade us
In the scent of the green
To keep back the Black One
Who rides unseen.

More than all violins
They entreat the sky,
The cool trees, the tall temples,
The pilgrims near by.

They compel the bleak winter
To embrace the Spring;
In all joy they banish
The Evil Thing.

As moths move, the mystics
Above the hay,
So give they of gladness
On the bride's day.

As children, the innocent
In the whistling Spring,
In beauty they banish
The Deformed Thing.

To the lanes of sorrow
They translate the sun;
They toll the defeat of
The Evil One.

(Copied and contributed by James Devaney.)

AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE, 1944

(The Sixth Annual Survey)

By H. M. Green

If 1944 produced nothing so good as *Moonlit Acre, Five Bells* or *Capricornia,* considering quantity as well as quality of literary production it was the best year since this record began. In verse, there were several outstanding newcomers and such a collection of little books worth reading as has not appeared in Australia for some time. The field of the novel yielded nothing out of the way, but there was an exceptional crop of short stories; the plays included two by Douglas Stewart that are among the best yet published in this country; and there were several notable biographies, in particular the long-expected life of Furphy. As in 1943, any Australian book of real merit stood an excellent chance of publication, and many were published whose merit was microscopical. But shortage of paper and manpower meant long delays, and the publishers are still in arrears; the next few years may very well set a record in publications. Nor does Australian work seem likely to be neglected; of fifty-four books brought out in 1943 by one of the biggest Australian publishing firms, fifty were Australian.

To begin with, three collections of verse that would together have made the literary reputation of any year if they had represented first appearances in book form: *Poems,* by the late Frank Wilmot ("Furnley Maurice"), selected by his old friend Percival Serle, anthologist and bibliographer of Australian verse; *One Hundred Poems,* which collects the contents of *Cuckooz Contrey* and *Five Bells* and all that Kenneth Slessor thinks worth republishing of *Earth Visitors*; and *Forests of Pan,* a selection, made by R. G. Howarth, from the poems not hitherto reprinted from Hugh McCrae's *Satyrs and Sunlight,* 1928. Wilmot gains doubly by selection. Hitherto his poems have been available only in a series of books and booklets, mostly out of print; also he is a very uneven writer, varying all the way between sentimentalism and satire. Unfortunately even the beauty of some of his best work is marred here and there by some naif echo from the tail-end of the romantic age in which he was born and brought up. Nevertheless, at his best Wilmot has an important place in Australian poetry, and Serle has given us his best. Slessor's early work is by no means so good as his later; each of his three books improved upon its predecessor. But his earliest period deserves representation, and the one-third of it that he has here preserved has obviously been selected with great care. Some may be sorry that he has

omitted "The Embarkation for Cythera"; was it because he thought this poem read too like a translation of a Norman Lindsay picture? *Forests of Pan* is mentioned last only because it is not representative like the rest. Another little book of McCrae's latest poems will call for mention next year, but it is more than time that his work was obtainable in a single inclusive volume. Here may be mentioned also the *Selected Poems of Marie E. J. Pitt,* a far-off voice, filled with the romance, the enthusiasm and the sometimes feministic revolt of the Australian nineties and early nineteen-hundreds. It is well that such a collection should be made, for Mrs. Pitt's little books are out of print, and she has a place in the history of Australian poetry.

Two other established poets, F. T. Macartney (*Ode of Our Times*) and Leonard Mann (*The Delectable Mountains*), have published this year verses that are not among their best. A. D. Hope and a couple of other poets have published a second booklet, in which Hope's work dwarfs the rest, though he has done much better. And *Angry Penguins* have published the "Ern Malley" verses with which McAuley and Stewart hoaxed them as well as others of our local intelligentsia. As to these verses it is not necessary to say more here than that their authors were mistaken in thinking that they were "utterly devoid of literary merit as poetry", and on the other hand that the suggestion that they were better than anything else of McAuley's or Stewart's could not have been made by anyone who had really considered what he was talking about.

Among the books by younger poets two stand out: Kenneth Mackenzie's *Moonlit Doorway* and Rosemary Dobson's *In a Convex Mirror.* Mackenzie has already published a long lyrical pastoral, *Our Earth,* but this is the first collection of his shorter poems. Most are love lyrics, recollections of beauty and passion; they flow frankly and freely, perhaps a little too freely. Rosemary Dobson, who is less known, is one of the foremost of our women poets. Miss Dobson's is an essentially detached, reflective talent, with a touch of mysticism about it. She sees actions, scenes, the world against a background of universals, of the absolute, into which they fade; she is haunted (but so are others of our younger poets), by duration, by time and its symbol and minister, the clock. R.G.H.'s *Spright and Geist* is another collection of love poems, but almost entirely different in kind from Mackenzie's. Here a scholar seeks release in simplicity, simplicity that is a little in the manner of the seventeenth century, and holds something of its sensuous charm. A couple of Angry Penguins must also be mentioned: Geoffrey Dutton (*Night Flight and Sunrise*) and Alister Kershaw (*Excellent Stranger*). The first

especially is worth some puzzling over by lovers of poetry, in spite of the characteristic faults of the Penguin tribe. But striking images and a touch of individuality and power are not enough if the images are disconnected and their significance sometimes obscure; if one feels that the poet's main object is sometimes only to be striking, and that the obscurity is at best careless and at worst deliberate. Some of the Penguins have real ability, but it is hamstrung and hampered by a fundamental insincerity: the insincerity of the would-be intellectual aristocrat, who, not quite sure of himself, desires at the same time to be self-sufficient and to impose.

Quite a number of the newer poets would have received fuller notice if they had published in a year less rich. The late Andrew White's *Selected Poems,* though interesting and full of promise, do not to the present writer suggest anything like the potentialities that are found in them by R. D. FitzGerald in his introduction. White was both thinker and poet, of a type with which FitzGerald would naturally sympathise, and he might conceivably have done much, but one can say no more than that. John Thompson (*Sesame and Other Poems*) is among the most promising of the younger men; he has a tendency to drop into prose, but strikes out some fine phrases and images. Joseph O'Dwyer is disappointing; he is a poet of some proved ability, who, in *The Turning Year,* thinks a little in the manner of T. S. Eliot; but he lacks Eliot's lyrical element, and this little book is hardly more than chopped prose. John Quinn, in *Battle Stations,* now and then, as in "Argument", gets there, or almost gets there, but he has not yet realised his poetic talent. Another who has not yet found herself is Janet Beaton (*Poems*), but her sincere emotion and a certain individuality of outlook suggest that she also may soon achieve something. Niall Brennan's *Ballad of a Government Man* is a delightful little piece of verse-satire. Others that may be mentioned are C. B. Christesen (*South Coast*), William Wannan (*The Corporal's Story*), and Max Dunn (*No Asterisks*).

Three novels are worth recording. Sarah Campion's *The Pommy Cow* is the last and best of a trilogy. Curious novels, the work, apparently, of a woman who writes from old memories, which play her false in some respects. More curious, though she says that "to call the Australian speech a form of Cockney [is] libel indeed", she makes her Queenslanders speak a form of Cockney. Yet they are Australians, even Queenslanders, and both they and their story, which deals mainly with the Australian Contingent in the Boer War, are interesting, particularly Mo Burdekin and his "Pommy Cow". A more serious defect is that all of a sudden and for no apparent reason,

Mo is killed in an accident and this reel of unorganised incident just stops. James Aldridge's second novel, *The Sea Eagle,* is written in the pseudo-primitive he-man style popularised by Hemingway at his worst. A pity, for it is a fine story and well put together. Max Harris's *Vegetative Eye* must be mentioned, because there is evidence of real ability beneath this pretentious mass of exhibitionist adolescence; but it is a dull and amorphous novel.

In the field of the short story Australia has seldom had so rich a year. Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Potch and Colour* appears to represent the pleasant autumn of her talent, which is not to say that spring may not come round again. These are good stories, heard and told by a practised and individual artist, but they lack something of the vitality and intensity of *Working Bullocks* and *Coonardoo.* Douglas Stewart's *A Girl with Red Hair* covers a wide range of character and incident. A few of the stories, for instance "The Man in the Hut", are the slightest of sketches, the titlepiece reads like an attempt to compress a novel into a short story, and "The Medium" reads like an episode from a novel. But "Carnival" and "The Bishops Shoot a Godwit" are worth inclusion in any Australian anthology. Marjorie Barnard is an accomplished and delicate stylist, and the pastel studies in *The Persimmon Tree* if slight are charming; unfortunately they are almost ruined by abominably careless printing. Little in Gavin Casey's *Birds of a Feather* approaches the standard of *It's Harder for Girls,* but it deserves better than this cheap production, with its poor paper and crude journalistic headlines above the titles of the stories. Don Edwards has not hitherto published a book, and *High Hill at Midnight* shows him, as Casey was shown by *It's Harder for Girls,* to be one of the leading Australian short story writers of the day. There is a grim, grey, rather subdued atmosphere about Edwards' stories, suggestive of the Depression which is the theme of several of them. It is curious how certain themes keep recurring with Edwards. "You Drive Lola Home" and "Escape for Her" are an obvious pair, to which the Kay stories are related; another pair is "The Woman from the Bend" and "The House on the Cliff"; and then there are "Fighting Makes a Man of You" and "A Bit of a Hit is Nothing". Edwards seems to prefer a particular line of country, as against Stewart, who ranges everywhere. It is worth noting that Casey and Edwards are *Bulletin* discoveries, and that Stewart edits the Red Page of the *Bulletin.* In *First Furrow* another *Bulletin* writer, Brian James, shows himself to be a direct descendant of Lawson and of A. H. Davis, before Davis took to clowning. James lacks as yet the art and the experience of, let us say, Frank Davison, but he has obviously lived the life of the small

farmer and bush worker, and he knows how to bring them before us with humour and realism, in a manner that is simple and natural and sincere. Quite different from any of these books is J. K. Ewers' *Tales from the Dead Heart,* a collection of aboriginal legends which should help to meet the demand that is springing up for Australian fairy tales.

1944 was a record year for drama, though that is not necessarily to say much. *Six Australian One-Act Plays* is the third collection of the kind to be published; let us hope there will be more like it. Besides work by some of the newer playwrights, it reprints the best-known play of the late Louis Esson, which is also among his best, *The Drovers.* Esson was the founder of modern Australian drama. All his plays are out of print, though one was included in a previous anthology, and he wrote full-length plays which have never been printed at all; Commonwealth Literary Fund Board please note. George Landen Dann's *Fountains Beyond* is a good play, but it has certain qualities that make one wish it were better. Its theme is the driving of the remnants of a tribe of semi-civilised aborigines out of the huts and the patch of land, part of their old camping ground, that they have occupied for years. The play is written with deep and sincere feeling, and the aboriginal characters are well realised and naturally presented. Yet it is not quite a success; Dann creates the right atmosphere, but he does not seem to have been able to find room for the full development of the white characters, or even, perhaps, of the theme as a whole. But the event of the year, and not in the sphere of the drama merely, was the publication (in one volume) of Douglas Stewart's *The Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover.* Both are quite different from their predecessor of 1943, *Ned Kelly,* and each is quite different from the other. *Ned Kelly* was broadcast, but these two were actually written for radio. The only characteristic that all three have in common is that they are clearly a poet's plays; this is most marked in *The Golden Lover,* which contains a number of beautiful and striking images; on the other hand, the poet seems here to have run away with the playwright. This is also, in spite of its tragedy, a humorous play; humour and poetry ripen together in it. The character-drawing is excellent, except for a queer contradiction in Tawhai just at the end; this reads as though the playwright had not quite made up his mind whether he was writing a comedy or a tragedy. *The Fire on the Snow* is by far the shortest of the three plays, and it is too starkly serious for humour. The announcer has a good deal to say in it, so that there is a considerable element of narrative, but one would not wish anything omitted. *The Golden Lover* glows with bright colour; *The Fire on the Snow* has the cold,

clear blue of a mountain of ice. The characters are sketched lightly but firmly, and the hearer feels himself to be among them; it is hard to imagine a much better play of its kind.

There were three interesting biographies. Randolph Bedford's *Naught to Thirty-Three* is, however, disappointing; it contains little of the personality of that vital and fascinating old buccaneer. James Devaney's *Shaw Neilson* is, on the contrary, full of the atmosphere of Neilson; it is both entertaining and informative, and careful beneath an appearance of casualness. Most important, however, is Miles Franklin and Kate Baker's *Joseph Furphy,* not because it in any way approaches the full and standard life which it is to be hoped will be written as soon as possible, but because it contains material that is unobtainable elsewhere and because it throws a good deal of light upon Furphy's contradictory and intriguing personality. One would wish it had thrown more. Some of its omissions are understandable and some surprising; could not room have been made for more of the review of *Such Is Life* that Furphy supplied when he was asked for a synopsis? It would have been interesting to compare this with Scott's review of the Waverley Novels, and why should one have to dig through the *Bulletin* files for it?

Of the rest of the year's large and varied output little can be mentioned. Ronald McCuaig's *Tales Out of Bed* are light, bright, witty and amusing; they are among the best in their kind that have appeared out here for a long while. Of the magazines of the year little need be said. *Meanjin* and *Southerly* continue to improve; responsibility for the first has been taken over by the Melbourne University Press, and for the second, at least for the time, by Messrs. Angus and Robertson, so that both have now a prospect of security. *Angry Penguins* remains the same; the "Ern Malley" episode seems to have afforded this magazine as much advertisement, complimentary or no, as its absurd prosecution for obscenity has brought it sympathy. The second number of *Australian New Writing,* though still tendentious, contains far better material than the first. *Pillar to Post,* a short story anthology compiled at random, as he says, by Harley Matthews, contains a little good work, but not much. Nothing will be said this year about the 1944 verse anthologies, Flexmore Hudson's *Poetry* and the rest, since one of them, *Australian Poetry, 1943,* was compiled by the present writer. Nor can anything be said here about his *Fourteen Minutes,* a book which was based on a series of wireless talks. In *Coast to Coast, 1943,* which was edited for that year by Frank Davison, two or three stories stand out, notably Xavier Herbert's "Kaijek the Songman"; most of the others fade easily from the mind. Doesn't Davison, himself one of our most accomplished

short story writers, tend to concentrate rather too much on art at the expense of life? His own contribution, "The Good Herdsman", is alive enough, but one feels that the anthology would have gained by the inclusion of some stronger stories, even if they had been rugged, even a little crude.

OLD FORTHRIGHT

Old Forthright lived in a dell they called for his name,
He kept his gun loaded behind the front door,
His two great dogs roamed free of the leash all night,
His fences were high, his gate had a padlock and chain,
And the roses climbed over the door.

Nobody came to the house in the day,
But at night the windows were lit, and the blinds—
White calico blinds washed whiter than milk—
Were drawn so that no one could see,
Were it gentleman, tramp, or policeman
Was seated within.
Then the corks were pulled, and the glasses clinked,
And a woman sang clear and high.
Stories were told of how Forthright was known as a Henry
The Eighth for wives; of how one wife died
Of a fire-stick stuck in her throat, and one
From a tomahawk blow in the ribs,
And one with a baby that came too soon.
And as for the others, one was hanged from a beam,
And one, they said, was buried alive,
And one was "poisoned in gruel".
Such were the stories they told of Forthright of Forthright's Dell,
When, as children, we passed his house on the way to school,
His white-washed house with the bunches of thyme
Each side of the clean-swept path,
The plum-trees sweet in the spring,

The apple-trees thick with their green and gold,
The moss-rose scenting the air by the locked front gate,
Where the glass of the windows shone clear as the dew,
And the blinds were white in the bleach;
Where the cluster-rose, and the Cloth of Gold
Climbed over the blue front door,
While, down in the paddock, the fat, sleek cows and the heavy draught-mares
Stood feeding, flank deep, in the billowing trefoil
That rolled in the wind like waves of the sea.

Old Forthright had teeth as clean as a hound's
And shoulders as strong as a bull;
He had eyes as blue as a mid-summer sky,
And a voice like a trumpet, when he shouted afar.
But soft and kind as a nesting bird's
When he spoke to his frail girl-child.
His fist was a hammer of iron,
And his back was marked by the convict lash—
Old Forthright of Forthright's Dell,
Ticket-of-leave man, lover of flowers,
And father of hare-lipped sons.

Years went by, and the once trim gate
Sagged loose on its hinge, the thistle stood high
Where the wheat was reaped,
The plums ran wild, the apples lay sour in the grass,
The thyme died down by the weed-held path,
And the white-washed walls were white no more,
For Forthright at last was old.

When the Parson came, and the old man's eyes
Wept crocodile tears, and his crocodile knees
Were bent in crocodile prayers
As to church on Sundays he went,
While the preacher thanked God for a soul that was saved.
Then the church people made him a match
With one of two sisters, old and sweet,
Whose delicate fingers stitched delicate lace,
Or on the piano played elegant, tinkling old airs.
Innocent women they were, who never once dreamed
How Henry the Eighth in old Forthright lived,
And was only discreetly hidden away
Lest the bird to be snared should be startled and fly!
And the end? The end was disaster.
Back to the Highlands the shocked sisters fled,
And Forthright returned to his old bad ways,
But a thousand times worse than before.
(See Matthew, twelfth chapter, and verses you'll find.
But this by the way.)

Then the old man died, and his sons died too,
Alike the sons of the wed and the unwed mothers,
When, a lifetime later, came into the port a ship,
And down from the gangway there stepped a girl.
A girl? Nay! It was Forthright himself, with his ice-blue eyes,
His great square shoulders, his hard set mouth,
And the lurch in his walk. And there, as his grandchild tripped to the quay,
With a start of remembrance time lifted a screen,
And a pane with a calico blind stood clear, a corkscrew squeaked,
And a woman sang; while away in a cottage, where lonely it lay,
A hare-lipped baby was crying.

MARY GILMORE.

THE SHOT

By A. S. Pushkin.
(Translated from the Russian by R. H. Morrison.)

I

We duelled.
Baratuinski.

I had sworn to kill him by right of the duel;
(After he had fired, my shot remained.)
An Evening in the Bivouac.

We were stationed in the little town of ***. The life of an army officer is well known: in the morning, drill and the riding-school; dinner with the commander of the regiment or at a Jewish restaurant; in the evening, punch and cards. In *** there was neither a single open house, nor one marriageable girl; we used to forgather in each other's quarters, where, except our uniforms, we saw nothing.

We admitted to our circle only one person who was not a soldier. He was about thirty-five years of age, and we therefore looked upon him as an old man. Experience gave him many advantages over us, and his habitual taciturnity, obstinate character, and biting tongue exerted a powerful influence upon our youthful minds. A certain air of mystery enveloped his past. He appeared to be Russian, but bore a foreign name. He had at one time served in the Hussars, and even with some fortune; nobody knew the reason that had caused him to resign and settle in this miserable town, where he lived in a style that was at once frugal and extravagant. He always went about on foot in a worn-out black frock-coat, but kept an open table for all the officers of our regiment. True, his dinners consisted of only two or three courses, prepared by a retired soldier, but the champagne flowed in streams. No-one knew what his circumstances were or what income he had, and no-one dared question him on the subject. He possessed a number of books, mostly military volumes, but including some novels. He willingly lent them and never asked for them back; on the other hand he never returned to the owner those books which he himself borrowed. His chief occupation consisted in pistol-shooting. The walls of his room were all riddled with bullets, and as full of holes as a honeycomb. A fine collection of pistols was the sole luxury in the wretched hovel where he lived. The skill which he had attained was incredible, and had he offered to shoot the pompon from somebody's cap, no-one in our regiment would have hesitated to offer his head for the purpose.

Our conversation often turned to duelling. Silvio (as I shall call him) never joined in it. To the question whether he had ever happened to fight a duel he would reply dryly that he had done so, but would not go into details, and it was obvious that such enquiries were not to his liking. We supposed that he had on his conscience some unfortunate victim of his terrible skill. For the rest, it never entered our heads to suspect him of anything like want of courage. There are persons whose appearance alone is enough to dispel such suspicions. An unexpected incident took us all by surprise.

One day about ten of our officers were dining with Silvio. We drank as usual, that is to say, a great deal. After dinner we set about persuading our host to hold the bank for us at a game of cards. For a long time he refused, as he practically never gambled; but in the end he ordered cards to be brought, poured out half a hundred ducats on the table, and sat down to take the bank. We gathered round him, and the game began. It was Silvio's habit to maintain complete silence while at play; he never questioned anyone else's moves or offered any explanation of his own. If a punter happened to make a mistake in counting he would immediately either pay out what was owing or note down the surplus. We already knew of this, and allowed him to conduct things in his own way. But among us was an officer who had not long been transferred to our regiment. Playing on this occasion, he absent-mindedly scored a point too many. Silvio, in his usual way, took the chalk and evened the score. The officer, thinking that the banker had made a mistake, began to enter into explanations. In silence Silvio went on with the game. The officer, losing patience, picked up the brush and rubbed out what appeared to him to be wrongly recorded. Silvio took the chalk and wrote it afresh. Inflamed with wine, the game, and the laughter of his comrades, the officer considered himself grossly insulted, and in a fury seized a brass candlestick from the table and hurled it at Silvio, who was just able to dodge the blow. The company was thrown into confusion. Silvio rose, turned pale with anger, and with eyes ablaze said:

"Sir, have the goodness to get out, and thank God that this has happened in my house."

We had no doubts as to the consequences, and considered our new comrade a dead man already. The officer withdrew, after saying that he was ready to answer for the offence whenever the gentleman of the bank might find it convenient. The game was continued for a few minutes more, but, feeling that our host no longer had his heart in it, we rose one by one and dispersed to our quarters, discussing the imminent vacancy in our ranks.

At riding-school on the following day we had already begun to ask whether the poor lieutenant was still alive, when he himself appeared among us. We put the same question to him; he replied that so far he had heard nothing from Silvio. This astonished us. We went to see Silvio and found him outside his house, sending shot after shot into an ace fixed to the gate. He received us as usual, and said not a word about the incident of the previous night. Three days passed, and the lieutenant still lived. We asked each other in amazement if it were possible that Silvio would not fight. Silvio did not fight. He was satisfied with a very offhand explanation and made his peace. This harmed him exceedingly in the opinion of us young people. Lack of boldness is the last thing excused by the young, who commonly see in courage the height of human perfection and the justification of every possible failing. In time, however, the whole matter was forgotten, and Silvio regained his former influence.

I alone could no longer be on the same terms of intimacy with him. Having by nature a romantic imagination, I had formerly been more warmly attached than the others to this man, whose whole life was an enigma, and who seemed to me to be the hero of some secret romance. He liked me; at least with me only did he put aside his rancorous way of speaking, to converse on various subjects with good nature and an unusual charm. But after this unfortunate evening I could not get rid of the thought that his honour had been sullied, and not cleared of his own free will. This thought prevented me from approaching him as before; I found it embarrassing even to look at him. Silvio was too intelligent and experienced not to discern this and guess the reason for it. It seemed to distress him; at any rate I noticed on one or two occasions a desire on his part to make an explanation to me. I avoided such opportunities, however, and Silvio ceased his efforts. Thenceforth I met him only in the company of my comrades, and our former frank conversations came to an end.

Surrounded by their many distractions, the inhabitants of the capital have no idea of the manifold sensations so familiar to those who live in village and town, an example of which is the expectation of mail-day. On Tuesdays and Fridays our regimental headquarters were thronged with officers; this one would be awaiting the arrival of his money, this one letters, another his newspaper. Packets were usually opened on the spot and items of news circulated, the orderly-room presenting a most animated picture. Silvio used to receive his letters addressed to our regiment, and usually attended to collect them. One day he was handed a packet, the seal of which he tore open with the appearance of the greatest impatience. His eyes gleamed as

he skimmed the letter. The officers, each occupied with his own letters, noticed nothing.

"Gentlemen", Silvio announced to them, "circumstances require my immediate departure; I leave tonight. I hope that you will not decline to have dinner with me on this last occasion. I shall expect you, too", he went on, turning to me, "I shall expect you without fail."

With these words he hurried out, and after agreeing to meet at Silvio's each of us went his own way.

I arrived at Silvio's at the appointed time, and found almost the entire regiment there. All his belongings were already packed, and there remained only the bare, shot-riddled walls. We sat down to dinner. Our host was in the best of spirits, and his good humour soon became general; corks popped every minute, the glasses foamed and sparkled incessantly, and with the greatest possible warmth we wished our departing friend a pleasant journey and every prosperity. When we rose from the table it was already late in the evening. While we were selecting our caps Silvio said good-bye all round, then took me by the arm and detained me just as I was about to leave.

"I want a word with you", he said quietly.

I stayed behind.

The guests departed, and the two of us were left together. We sat down opposite each other and lit our pipes in silence. Silvio was preoccupied; there was no trace now of his spasmodic mood of gaiety. His saturnine pallor, his flashing eyes, and the dense smoke issuing from his mouth gave him an appearance that was truly demoniacal. After several minutes had passed, Silvio broke the silence.

"It may be that we shall never see each other again", he said to me. "Before our parting, I wanted to clear up matters between us. You have been able to observe that I care little for the opinion of others; but I like you, and I feel it would have been painful to me had you been left under a wrong impression."

He stopped and began to fill his pipe, which had burned out. With eyes lowered I waited in silence.

"It seemed strange to you", he continued, "that I did not demand satisfaction of that drunken fool R***. You will agree that, as I had choice of weapons, his life was in my hands, while mine was scarcely threatened. I might ascribe my moderation to magnanimity alone, but I don't wish to lie: had I been able to chastise R*** without in any way hazarding my own life, then nothing would have induced me to forgive him."

I looked at Silvio in amazement. Such a confession completely took me aback.

Silvio went on: "It is indeed so, I have no right to risk death. Six years ago I received a slap in the face, and my enemy is still alive."

My curiosity was keenly aroused.

"You did not fight him?" I asked. "Then circumstances must have separated you?"

"I did fight him", answered Silvio, "and here is a memento of our duel."

Silvio got up and took from a box a red cap with gold braid and tassel (what the French call a *bonnet de police*). He put it on; a bullet had passed through it a couple of inches from the forehead.

"You are aware", Silvio continued, "that I once served in the *** regiment of Hussars. My character is well known to you; I have been accustomed to take the lead in everything, but in my youth this was a passion with me. In our day riotous living was the fashion. I was the most unruly man in the army. We prided ourselves on our feats in drinking; I out-drank the celebrated B***,[1] whose praises have been sung by D. D***. Duels were very common in our regiment; I was present at all of them, either as witness or participant. My comrades idolized me, while the commanders of the regiment, who were constantly being changed, looked upon me as a necessary evil.

"I was quietly (or rather, rowdily) enjoying my fame, when there was transferred to our regiment a young man of wealthy and distinguished family (I don't wish to name him). In all my life I have never met such a fortunate, brilliant fellow! Imagine youth, wit, good looks, the most exuberant gaiety, the most reckless bravery, a famous name, untold wealth, which meant a liberal supply of money always on hand, and picture to yourself the effect he must have produced amongst us. My supremacy was shaken. Attracted by my renown, he began to seek my friendship, but I received him coolly, and he, without the slightest regret, withdrew from me. I began to hate him. His success in the regiment and in the society of women drove me to utter despair. I set out to seek a quarrel with him; to my epigrams he replied with epigrams which always seemed to me more spontaneous and more pungent than my own, and which were certainly far more entertaining—he made jokes, whereas I indulged in malice. Finally, one night at a ball in the home of a Polish landowner, seeing him the object of the attention of all the ladies, and in particular of the hostess herself, with whom I was on very friendly terms, I whispered in his ear some coarse, puerile insult. He became incensed and gave me a slap in the face. We seized our swords; the women

[1] A. P. Burtsov, hero of a poem by Pushkin's friend D. V. Davuidov (1784-1839).—Translator's note.

fainted; we were separated, and that same night we set off to fight a duel.

"Day was just breaking. I had taken up my position at the appointed place with my three seconds. With indescribable impatience I awaited my adversary. The spring sun had risen, and it was already growing hot. I caught sight of him in the distance. He was coming on foot, his tunic hanging on his sword, and accompanied by one second. We advanced to meet him. He drew near, holding his cap, which was filled with wild cherries. The seconds measured out twelve paces for us. I had to fire first, but in my hatred I was so agitated that I could not rely on the sureness of my hand, and in order to give myself time to become cool I ceded the first shot to him. My adversary would not agree to this, so it was decided to draw lots. The first number fell to him, fortune's eternal favourite. He took aim and sent a shot through my cap. Now it was my turn. At last his life lay in my hands. I looked at him avidly, striving to catch even a shadow of discomposure. He stood under my pistol, picking the riper cherries from his forage-cap and spitting out the stones, which flew to my very feet. His unconcern maddened me. I asked myself what was the use of depriving him of his life, when he attached absolutely no value to it. A malicious thought flashed through my mind. I lowered my pistol.

" 'It seems you are not ready for death just now', I said to him, 'you wish to have your breakfast. I have no desire to disturb you.'

" 'You are not disturbing me at all', he replied. 'Please yourself whether you fire or not, just as you wish. The shot remains yours; I will always be ready at your service.'

"I turned to the seconds, declaring that for the time being I did not intend to fire, and with that the duel was terminated.

"I retired from the army and withdrew to this little town. Since then not a day has gone by without my thinking of revenge. Now my hour has come . . ."

Silvio took from his pocket the letter he had received that morning and gave it to me to read. Someone (his attorney, it seemed) wrote to him from Moscow that a *certain person* was soon to be joined in lawful wedlock to a young and beautiful girl.

"You will be able to guess", said Silvio, "who this *certain person* is. I am leaving for Moscow. We shall see whether on the eve of his marriage he looks upon death as unconcernedly as he once awaited it with his cherries!"

With these words Silvio rose, threw his cap on the floor, and began to pace up and down the room like a tiger in its cage. I had

listened to him without moving, agitated by strange, contradictory feelings.

A servant entered and announced that the horses were ready. Silvio shook me firmly by the hand; we embraced each other. He took his seat in the carriage, in which lay two trunks, one containing his pistols, the other his personal effects. Once more we bade each other farewell, and the horses galloped away.

II

Several years passed, and family matters obliged me to settle in a humble little village in the district of N**. Occupied with the management of my household, I never ceased silently to long for my former boisterous and carefree life. Most of all was it difficult for me to accustom myself to whiling away the autumn and winter evenings in absolute solitude. Until dinner I somehow managed to pass the time, conversing with the bailiff, watching the work in progress, or inspecting new buildings; but as soon as it began to grow dark I was quite at a loss where to turn. I knew by heart the few books I had found in the cabinets and storeroom. I had been told and retold all the stories which my housekeeper Kirilovna could recall. The songs of the peasant-women depressed me. I tried drinking liqueur, but it made my head ache, and moreover I confess I was afraid of becoming a *drunkard from chagrin,* that is, the *chronic* kind of drunkard, of which I had seen many examples in our district. Of near neighbours I had none, except two or three such *chronics,* whose conversation consisted for the most part of hiccups and sighs. Loneliness was preferable.

Four versts from my house was situated a wealthy estate belonging to the Countess B***, but occupied only by her agent; the Countess had visited her estate only once, in the first year of her married life, and then to spend there no more than a month. During the second spring of my retirement, however, a report was circulated that the Countess and her husband were coming to spend the summer at their country home. They arrived in fact at the beginning of June.

The advent of a rich neighbour marks an important epoch in the life of a village community. The landowners and their servants discuss it for two months beforehand and three years afterwards. For my part I confess that the news of the arrival of my young and beautiful neighbour produced a strong effect upon me. I burned with impatience to set eyes on her, and consequently on the first Sunday following

her arrival I set out after dinner for the village of *** to introduce myself to Their Excellencies, as their nearest neighbour and most humble servant.

A footman showed me into the Count's study, and went to announce me. The study was very spacious and was furnished with all possible luxury. Round the walls stood cabinets filled with books, and upon each a bronze bust; over the marble mantelpiece was a large mirror; the floor was covered with a green cloth and spread with rugs. Unaccustomed to luxury in my own mean abode, and not having for a long time seen such opulence in the home of another, I was overcome with nervousness and awaited the Count with some trepidation, as a petitioner from the provinces awaits the appearance of a Minister. The doors opened, and a handsome man about thirty-two years of age entered. The Count approached me with an open and friendly look; I made an effort to pluck up my courage and was about to introduce myself, when he anticipated me. We sat down. His conversation, which was unconstrained and genial, soon dispelled my uncouth shyness. I had just begun to recover my usual composure, when the Countess suddenly appeared, and I became more confused than ever. She was indeed beautiful. The Count presented me. I wished to appear at ease, but the more I tried to assume an air of unconstraint, the more awkward did I feel. My host and hostess, in order to give me time to recover myself and become accustomed to my new acquaintances, began to converse together, treating me as a good neighbour and without ceremony. Meanwhile I had begun to walk to and fro, examining the books and pictures. I am no connoisseur of pictures, but there was one which attracted my attention. It represented some scene in Switzerland; what struck me, however, was not the painting itself, but the fact that the picture had been pierced by two bullets, one of which had lodged on top of the other.

"A good shot, that", I said, turning to the Count.

"Yes", he replied, "a very remarkable shot. And do you shoot well?" he added.

"Passably", I replied, delighted that the conversation had at last fallen on a subject near to me. "At thirty paces I never miss a card—that is, with pistols that I know."

"Really?" said the Countess, with a look of great interest. "And you, my dear", she added, turning to her husband, "could you hit a card at thirty paces?"

"Some time", replied the Count, "we shall try. In my day I was not a bad shot, but it's quite four years since I had a pistol in my hand."

"Oh", I remarked, "in that case I'll wager that Your Excellency will not hit a card at twenty paces. Pistol-shooting requires daily practice. This I know from experience. In our regiment I was counted one of the best shots. It once came about that I did not touch a pistol for a whole month; my own were being repaired. What do you think happened, Your Excellency? When I first began shooting again, I missed a bottle four times in succession at twenty-five paces. We had a captain, a witty and entertaining person; he happened to be present, and he remarked to me: 'It is evident, my friend, that your hand won't lift itself against the bottle.' No, Your Excellency, practice mustn't be neglected, or one loses one's skill. The best shot I have ever happened to meet practised shooting every day, and never less than three times before dinner. This was a custom with him, like his glass of vodka."

The Count and Countess were pleased that I had begun to talk.

"And what sort of shot was he?" the Count asked me.

"Well, this sort, Your Excellency: he would happen to see a fly settle on the wall—you may smile, Countess, but by the Lord, it's the truth—he would happen to see this fly and he would call out, 'Kuzka, my pistol!' Kuzka would bring him a loaded pistol and — bang! the fly would disappear into the wall."

"How amazing!" said the Count. "And what was his name?"

"Silvio, Your Excellency."

"Silvio!" cried the Count, leaping from his chair, "you knew Silvio?"

"How could I not know him, Your Excellency? He was one of our best friends; he was received in our regiment as a brother officer. But it's now about five years since I had any news of him. And so Your Excellency also knew him?"

"Yes, I knew him, indeed I knew him. Did he never tell you of a certain very singular incident?"

"Not the slap in the face, Your Excellency, that he received from some blackguard at a ball?"

"And did he tell you the name of that blackguard?"

"No, Your Excellency, he did not tell me . . . Oh! Your Excellency", I went on, guessing the truth, "forgive me . . . I didn't know . . . Was it then you?

"Yes, it was I", replied the Count, with a look of extreme agitation, "and that bullet-marked picture is a memento of our last encounter . . ."

"Oh, my dear", said the Countess, "in Heaven's name don't speak of it; it would terrify me to listen."

"No", the Count insisted, "I must tell our guest. He knows how I insulted his friend; now let him learn how Silvio took his revenge."

The Count drew up an armchair for me, and with the liveliest interest I heard the following story:

"Five years ago I was married. The first month—the honeymoon[1]—I spent here, in this village. To this house I am indebted for the best moments of my life, and one of its most painful memories.

"One evening we were out together, riding on horseback. My wife's horse for some reason grew restive; she became frightened, handed the reins to me, and went home on foot. I rode on ahead. In the courtyard I noticed a travelling-carriage. I was told that in my study was waiting a man who had not wished to give his name, but who had simply stated that he had business with me. I came into this room, and in the semi-darkness saw a man covered with dust and unshaven; he was standing here by the fireplace. I went up to him, trying to recognize his features.

" 'You don't remember me, Count?' he said, in a trembling voice.

" 'Silvio!' I cried, and I confess I felt my hair stand on end.

" 'Exactly', he went on. 'There is a shot owing to me, and I have come with my pistol to fire it; are you ready?'

"A pistol protruded from his side pocket. I measured out twelve paces and stood there in the corner, requesting him to fire at once, before my wife returned. He made no attempt to hurry, but asked for a light. Candles were brought in. I shut the doors, forbidding anyone to enter, and again requested him to fire. He drew out his pistol and took aim . . . I counted the seconds . . . I thought of her . . . A terrible minute passed! Silvio lowered his arm.

" 'I regret', he said, 'that my pistol is not loaded with cherry-stones . . . the bullet is somewhat heavier. . . . But it seems to me that the whole affair resembles murder rather than a duel. I am not accustomed to firing on an unarmed man. Let us begin over again; we shall draw lots to see who is to have first shot.'

"My head was reeling. I think I refused . . . In the end we loaded another pistol; we rolled up two scraps of paper and he put them into his cap, that same cap through which my bullet once had passed. Again I drew the first number.

" 'You are devilish lucky, Count', he said, with a smile that I shall never forget.

"I don't know what possessed me, or how he induced me to do it. . . but I fired, and hit that picture."

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[1] In English in the original.—Translator's note.

(The Count pointed to the bullet-pierced picture. His face glowed like fire; the Countess was whiter than her own handkerchief; while I could not restrain an exclamation.)

"I fired", the Count continued, "and, thank God, I missed. Then Silvio—at this moment he was truly terrible—Silvio began to take aim at me. Suddenly the doors flew open. Masha rushed into the room, and with a shriek threw herself on my neck. Her presence fully restored my self-possession.

" 'My dear', I said, 'don't you see that we are only joking? How frightened you are! Go and drink a glass of water and then come back to us; I will introduce you to an old friend and comrade.'

"Masha was still in doubt.

" 'Tell me, is my husband speaking the truth?' she said, turning to the terrible Silvio. 'Is it true that you are both joking?'

" 'He is always joking, Countess', Silvio replied. 'He once jokingly gave me a slap in the face; as a joke he sent a shot through this cap of mine; it was as a joke that he fired at and missed me just then. And now I feel inclined for a joke . . .'

"With these words he began to take aim at me—in front of her! Masha threw herself at his feet.

" 'Get up, Masha, for shame!' I cried in a fury. 'And you, sir, will you cease making sport of this unfortunate woman? Are you going to fire, or not?'

" 'I am not', replied Silvio. 'I am satisfied; I have seen your confusion, your alarm. I forced you to fire on me, that is enough. You will remember me. I leave you to your conscience.'

"Thereupon he turned to go, but, stopping at the door, he glanced round at the picture which my shot had hit, fired at it almost without taking aim, and disappeared. My wife lay in a faint. The servants did not dare stop him, but watched him in terror. He went down the front steps, called his coachman, and had driven off before I could recover my senses."

The Count was silent. In this way I learned the end of a story whose beginning had once made so deep an impression upon me. The hero of it I never saw again. It is said that Silvio, at the time of the revolt led by Alexander Ypsilanti, commanded a detachment of Hetairists and was killed in action at Sculeni.

SEVEN VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF JOHN DONNE

Yet dare I'almost be glad I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for mee,
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
What a death were it then to see God dye?
It made his own Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
It made his footstoole crack and the Sunne wink.
Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
And turne all spheares at once, peirc'd with those holes?
Could I behold that endlesse height which is
Zenith to us and our Antipodes,
Humbled below us?

I

Remembering the great devotional inward cry of Donne
Alone I stare in the morning at the hostile casual sun:
Marvellous and bloody it rises from a vast unholy East.
I turn to the troubled stormclouds in the dark West,
And still there seems no sanctity, and certainly no lack
Of fear and misery. And I cry in the morning, Black
Black black is the terrible colour of this unredeemed earth,
This world beyond the canonical East. No divine birth,
No sinner's death has changed it; from its murderous sea
Rises no comforting image of the great adorned tree;
The unvisited sea and jungle are unpurged still;
Black black black is the colour, colour of evil until
Christ cruelly hoisted bring the maddest world peace.
On this Goodfriday thrashing my mind, what awful sacrifice
Shall be required of me, of many small Christs shall be required,
Sweating this moment in their Gethsemanes, this moment attired
In the asphyxiating dress of fear? Already vile birds
Await the sacrificed unembalmed flesh. The words
Of agony, the battering thunder and the far cloud
Surely will not attend. What man of the small sad god
Dead in this evil luxuriant garden will say, he died
To save us, deny that we were a thousand times denied
While the cocks shrieked in England, and in Germany the poor died?

II

The sun comes up, heaved over the new day's horizon of fear;
Who should grant to us the legionary's merciful spear,
The vinegar of compassion, or a woman's mourning cry?
I pray that the dreaded cup be removed, relieved the misery
Of death abominable, and sky shamelessly remote—
But in my soul rejoice that it is to the appalling hot
East that I move, to the dawn, to the death, to the cross
That my passion and agony may twist and distil and toss
Into the conflagration of the amazed primitive sky.
Let the heathen East scour my sins and beat on my face and dry
The penitential desperate tears, and my wounds disfigure the sky.

III

To the new constellation of wounds round the bright inverted moon
Bow down all sinners; genuflect dwarf, Filipino, quadroon,
Shintoist, Dionysian, Fascist, Celt and Jew;
For it is prophesied that all your despair shall be forgiven you;
From a fate worse than life I was crucified to save you all,
On a day when the sea trembled and the lightning stabbed through a pall
Of Dantean darkness, my head dropped; I agonised for you all.
We are not Jesus; but let us be considered people of the same name
Slain for our bad verses, our old-fashioned texts, for the shame
Of not being Dionysus, or for daring to flaunt the same name.

Pygmies and idiots, Jesuits, workinggirls, dreamers of dreams,
Of your small damning sins our death redeems
Only the sin of wanhope; look past the East and find there
Scribbled in letters of fire on the wild East's flare
Your sin; for the sun knows and cares as little as you do there.

But we are not, O golden God, the saviours, but the unredeeming
Sacrifice on the flamboyant sunlit altars; gleaming
Knives are gripped above our unwilling sensitive hearts.
This day or another terrible day from the East the darts
Of heat will kindle the fires; and the knives strike into our hearts.

IV

That day, the Goodfriday of our inapposite sacrificial defection
From the beautiful; to a death without hope of resurrection
Save by the white untender hands of the godless waves,
Where, urgent and frightened we cry, is the symbol which saves,
The saviour, the slight lolling figure on the familiar cross?
And the small human groups about it, shadows of earthly woes?
Shall the sweet scented body and the transcendental wounds
Enter the empty tomb of our hearts, and the small ignorant sounds
Of weeping pierce their petrified barriers? To us drowned
What man shall present a breathing body where scars abound
To prove the perpetual scapegoat? How can our sins be forgiven
Our souls washed clean, when from this monstrous storm-ridden heaven
No dove descends; in this inhuman desert no prophet cries
The solemn advent of the impeccable lamb for sacrifice?
Oh, that we have outstripped the clutched crucifix our horizon cries!

V

This day, knowing that after tomorrow the next sea-swamped humid day
Will bring no lilies and no hopes, but at best the gift of a delay
In the plans of that strategical merciless god the sun,
And fearing death no more than a man fears death, I run
With the labyrinthine thread of this passion through my mind:
Death I fear no less than a man fears death, as a blind
Severance of lips, a premature coda, a statement of themes
Unexplored, unexpected, immature as the desires of dreams:
But sacrifice—the taut misery over the sunny altar's stains,

The ineradicable stigmata on the memory that remains
Of the pale shadow before the parted lips, in the fortunate towns
Where the profane love strutted; on the books, the hair, the gowns
Which the wounded hands loved; and the sanctified chiselled name—
Disgusts; death is the mysterious honour, this the shame
Of this ineffectual gesture in the abandoned murderous sea.
It will spew up a mocking skull of coral, a Calvary
For the death of the gods, abandoned and murdered by the sea.

VI

And it seems that my symbol must be the cross of my own making,
And the violated body be mine; to those who are ever seeking
Their health in the victim's murder, the comfort and peace
I make, I gladly present; and to the cynical teeming seas
And the prolific vegetable I bow my ironical eyes,
Making them gamblers at a crucifixion, making them wise
Ignorers of the pathetic event. Carelessly let there go on
The business of coral and slum, and the tides obey the moon.
Behind me the unobserving backs bend over their wicked schemes,
And the eyes see not, for they are small and tired, that which redeems
The small inescapable sins, and the world works on as old
And cruel as the bird and spider . . . spider, unknowing as the axe
which felled
The precious tree. Though none need fear to turn the face
To the strange wounded body in the unvisited place—
For to strike terror it has no power, and no power to cry
Commands to the insolent creature stars, sea and sky,
Perhaps even cannot absolve the girl and the ignorant sun
From the great hopeless sin in both of them begun
When the hot stars first moved—none turns a wondering face.
And so the averted universe ignores the loneliness
Of the small ironical sacrifice. Oh, should some living man
Rejoicing at Lent's brilliant Easter ending, scan
The prophetic East, sensing beyond the divine sand
That makes a small desert about the Holy Land
Some horrible new event that changes the incorrigible world,
May this bring him only to pity the dead wastrels hurled
Endlessly about by the great seas of the unredeemed world.

VII

To the West bending, from God's death Donne hid his face;
From the West, spurning the ikon, the memory, the divine embrace
I turn, and turn to the implacable sky my face.

FRANK KERMODE, R.N.

RUDE REMARKS ON *FIRST FRUITS*

By R. G. Howarth

The Mitchell Library copy of the second edition, 1823, of Barron Field's *First Fruits of Australian Poetry,* has three fly-leaves at the front. On the second of these is inscribed: "The Misses Blaxland. With the Author's compliments." The name of a later owner, A. E. Walker, of "Rhodes. Ryde.", appears on the same leaf. On the third is to be found the signature of D. S. Mitchell. In another nineteenth-century hand, on the first leaf, a pencilled "Impromtu, on reading a jumble* of hard words and Sublime nonsense by Baron Field Esqr Judge of supreme Court—" at once tries and shocks the eye. It runs:

> From ridicule and cold neglect
> What can this poem shield
> But who could better fruits expect
> From such a barren Field—

Field's choice of title for his book had laid him even more open than he was before to puns upon his name. The same advantage is taken in "an anonymous squib" which Mr. Brian Elliott, writing in *The Australian Quarterly* for March, 1943, on Field as "The First Austral Harmonist", quotes:

> Thy poems, Barron Field, I've read,
> And thus adjudge their meed:—
> So poor a crop proclaims thy head
> A *barren field* indeed!

Mr. Elliott does not give the source of this "poem".

Who the author of the epigram written in the Mitchell copy was appears to be unknown. He also added a personal footnote to the line "A ship's the only poetry we see", on page 14: "Had this sort of a man called a Poet been in the groves of Blarney this morning, he would have seen things more likely to inspire his genius than a Ship—i.e. if he has a soul." Here a reference may be intended to the well-known song, "The Groves of Blarney", by Richard Millikin; but there is deep irony in the comment.

The epigraph to the poem on this page is "Anticipation is to a young country what antiquity is to an old". Our waggish annotator has altered "country" to "lady".

* The Mitchell Library card catalogue, wrongly, has "grumble".

WRITER AND READER

PARADOX AND PARABLE

Shaw Neilson. By James Devaney. (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1944.)

With the nationalist poets and propagandists beating their imitation tomtoms all around us it is interesting to reflect that our two best poets have nothing recognisably national about them. The majestic and turgid flame of Brennan's verse was not lit from the local bushfires, and never condescends to mention the landscape of boundary-riders and kangaroos. That penetrative and sombre presentation of an insoluble moral dilemma, on which his fame must ultimately rest, owes nothing to an appreciation of the out-back and the dramatic puerilities of a life spent in combat with local meteorological devils and the ravages of foot-rot. Brennan's creative genius, as well as the verbal monsters which it sometimes bred, is part of the general tradition of European letters, part of the historical agony of European thought. His achievement would have been no different in atmosphere and texture had he lived his life on Tristan da Cunha instead of in Sydney.

But Brennan spent his life among books. Shaw Neilson is interesting because he spent nearly all his life cut off not only from books but even from the society of literary people. He had practically no education. For a large part of his life his eyes were so weak that he could scarcely write, let alone read. He grew up and spent two-thirds of his life in an unceasing struggle to earn a bare living on the land or as a labourer. From such a man, if from anyone, we should have expected that the natural spring of poetry in him would have produced verse that was prompted by the Australian scene and celebrated it in the native language of the Australian countryside. Here, if anywhere, one might have looked for an antipodean Burns, rhyming at the plow and rhyming in the idiom of a plowman of genius. But nothing could be further from the truth than this supposition. Neilson's verse is mannered and literary. It employs the idiom of a refined and bookish culture; its rhythms are studied and of epicene delicacy. Above all it almost completely ignores what has come to be regarded as the typical Australian landscape, people and atmosphere. You will find no sunlit plains extended in Shaw Neilson, no stock-rails, no drought-stricken cattle, no hint of Clancy with his thumb-nail dipped in tar. You will find instead a small but constant source of pure poetry, which selects an occasional animal or tree or incident, not for itself, but as a symbol of the inner life of feeling, and which employs a self-conscious and artificial literary idiom of a sort that is now rather out of fashion, a language as charming, as feminine in its sensibility, as exotically poetical as the pictures of dresess in the *Modes Parisiennes* of the eighteen eighties. So much for the theory of the literary Antaeus, the theory that Australian poetry cannot be good unless it springs from the native soil and celebrates it.

Another critical fallacy of our time is a belief in the saving graces of realism and naturalism in language. Shaw Neilson's verse is an illustration of the fact that a highly artificial style is not in the least incompatible with natural and direct expression or with simplicity and sincerity of feeling. And the contrast is the more marked when we compare it with the humdrum graces of so many contemporary poets in whom the extreme naturalness of conversational diction only serves to reveal superficial and tawdry emotions, the kind of artificiality which is self-conscious enough not to dare create and impose a language of the heart. Neilson often fails to impose his language. He often

falls into the diction of false sentiment and he sometimes commits the worst excesses of the artful plucker of heart-strings. But in the main he is sure and exact and he is never afraid to turn to his occasion those resources of poetry which lie beyond the conventions of ordinary conversation.

James Devaney's biography is a pleasant and adequate piece of work, as simple and unassuming in its treatment as the man with whom it deals:

"His talk and his bearing were the same whether he was with simple neighbours or distinguished visitors. He was never in the least embarrassed in any company, never gave the slightest impression of self-consciousness or talking for effect. There was a natural dignity about him. He would discuss his own work simply and frankly if the conversation came round that way, and in any company would just as naturally refer to his pick and shovel days. As he talked he would sometimes absent-mindedly untidy his hair with his hand till it was all standing up."

At the same time, as this extract shows, even Devaney cannot avoid something of the surprise common to most people who have not worked with a pick and shovel that a writer should be unembarrassed at earning his living in this way. One would not expect Cervantes to have been embarrassed when referring to his life as a slave or as a corn dealer, nor would one expect Emily Bronte to have blushed because she had been a governess and done the family ironing. This very faint hint of patronage is almost the only blemish in Devaney's portrait of the poet. Otherwise it is an admirable life. He lets Neilson tell his own story as much as possible, quoting from letters and conversations. There is no attempt to dramatise the long martyrdom of Neilson's life, the ceaseless struggle to earn a bare living in the face of drought and depression, the wretched existence of the small farmer without capital clinging to his scrap of miserable land, of the casual labourer to whom three meals a day is the most he can hope for and security an undreamed-of luxury. Devaney tells this story plainly and baldly, and it is the more moving told this way. He gives a just account of Neilson's relations with A. G. Stephens. He does not minimise Neilson's debt to Stephens, who helped him to become articulate, gave him the prop of personal interest, led him to be critical and discriminating and, most important of all, believed in him and got him published. Nor, on the other hand, does he overlook those less admirable qualities in Stephens from which the poet and his work suffered, the bumptious bad taste which led him to rewrite the poet's work for publication, the commercial shrewdness with which he cornered the publishing rights to the poet's output, the limitations of judgment by which his very appreciation of Neilson's work tended to cramp and confine the poet's development. Neilson had a humble, though not uncritical, faith in Stephens's judgment. Genius often needs a schoolmaster, but equally it needs to outgrow and revolt from tutelage. This Neilson never succeeded in doing, and it is a pity that a writer of his quality should never have freed himself completely from the domination of the robust vulgarity of the author of *The Pearl and the Octopus.*

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the care Devaney has taken to collect and publish Neilson's own views on his art, his comments on his own poems, his preoccupation with the delicacies of metre for which his verse has always won attention. Neilson is proved to have been, more than his critics have supposed, an inventor and creator of musical resources in verse. His poems were composed very slowly and often changed before they were finished. Humble and diffident as his attitude was to the learned and the literary, there is nothing diffident or imitative in his attitude to his own poetry.

He worked at it with a matter of fact confidence in his own resources and a precise vision of what he was aiming at.

But more than anything this book is a parable of the conditions under which the writer in Australia, and particularly the poet, is generally forced to work. Neilson himself would probably have denied that his life was a tragedy. He had far too little of the self-dramatising bent in him for that. But it is tragic just the same. In its extremest form here is the tragedy of the writer living in a barbarous country, among people by whom his art and his preoccupation with the life of the spirit are regarded sometimes with awed incomprehension, more often with the amused tolerance of the fellow navvy, who, because of Neilson's poor sight, undertook to write down one of his poems:

"After a few lines came his first muttered comment, 'Jesus!' Before it was finished he had found full tongue: 'Yeah, but what is it? What's it *for*?' and 'Yeah but what do you want to *do* it for?' and 'But this ain't poetry anyway Jack, you must be going off your onion.'"

That, in other language, might be the opinion of the average editor and publisher today, the voice of the Australian public they serve. Neilson's life, as I say, is a parable, the parable of any Australian writer of more than ordinary perception or power, condemned to spend that power in other and mercenary tasks, "Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves" while mediocrity which meets the public taste is given the opportunity to devote itself to the exploitation of puerile recipes.

A. D. Hope.

FOUR POETS AND AN ANTHOLOGY

The Moonlit Doorway. By Kenneth MacKenzie. (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1944. 5s.) *Spright and Geist.* By R.G.H. (Angus and Robertson, 1944. 2s. 6d.) *The Delectable Mountains.* By Leonard Mann. (Angus and Robertson, 1945. 3s. 6d.) *As Iron Hills.* By Flexmore Hudson. (Robertson and Mullens, Melbourne, 1944. 6s.) *Australian Poetry, 1943.* Selected by H. M. Green. (Angus and Robertson, 1944. 3s. 6d.)

Kenneth MacKenzie is a poet of rare sensitivity. His latest volume, *The Moonlit Doorway,* interprets a variety of moods in language that verges on the sublime. Essentially, he is a poet of half-tones. A considerable part of this book consists of nocturnes and interiors. Once inside the moonlit doorway, the reader is shut away from the outside world. It is

> . . . . . a doorway
> set full of night and this same genial pallor
> of moon-made skymagic.

Day is something to be dreaded: "Here is the red dawn you hate." When he emerges into the day in a poem called "Morning", it is with a memory of the night that preceded it and a regret that

> that hour defeated us, and morning's hosts
> came down the grass in triumph all about us,
> laughing, and night was gone from us for ever.

He sees children at play, not under the benison of the sun, but

> My children in the luscious golden dusk
> alone with moths and timeless minutes play.

Delightful lines, but curiously subdued and inadequate to the vigour in the movements of playing children. It is, of course, highly subjective poetry. The poet, not the children, is the one who is playing with moths and timeless moments.

However, the major theme is love, and the love depicted is a moment's burning passion with its subsequent queries and doubts: the "sadness, Nemesis of lovers". It may be a mischievous and altogether improper thought, but some of his language recalls a scene in Lawson Glassop's *We Were The Rats.* Do you remember Gordon Harday reading to the boys in the drear monotony that was Tobruk some American *Saucy Stories* that had broken through the siege? "'His eyes slowly descended to her alluring bosom, where two plump, jutting hillocks' . . . whacko! . . . 'pushed proudly and stiffly forward beneath her grey dress'", etc., etc.

In *The Moonlit Doorway* the "jutting hillocks" become "the moonlike mountains of your bosom". In an earlier poem they are "proud and conscious breasts" that "stare through her fingers searching the hours to behold a lover coming". Further we have:

> This perfect belly sculptured more mysteriously
> than all her other parts; mysterious curves
> that are and yet are not. Here love will lie
> navel to navel if the match be right.

"Whacko!" one feels, "What a pity this didn't get into Tobruk too!"

It would, of course, be unfair to labour this point too far, or to suggest that Kenneth MacKenzie has no other themes, but night and love are major obsessions in this book. His best poem, "June Night", has a memorable first verse:

> The sun has never seemed as bright
> as does the moon this June night,
> when the pure frosts gather and settle
> on post, pool, flower and nettle,
> cold and calm as a child's kiss.
> Never was day more gay than this.

Here is a vivid image, and, for once, an image which sets the poem in relation to its physical surroundings. But timorously. Frosts, posts, pools, flowers and nettles are so universal as to suggest an almost idyllic landscape. It would, one feels, be a sacrilege if anything as indigenous as a boobook owl flitted into the picture.

R.G.H. is a different sort of poet, although his theme, too, is love. But it is a different sort of love, a more permanent expression of feeling than a moment's ecstasy:

> O must this passion born with spring
> At winter's fall be old?
> Then what of all those springs to come,
> When earth renews and thrives?
> Take comfort, heart, this is not death:
> Such love has many lives.

There is this vast difference, too: that, whereas Kenneth MacKenzie's lines are rich in imagery, so rich, indeed, that at times one feels that this is a superhuman lover, R.G.H.'s verse has a bare economy of words that conceals a deeper meaning. One quatrain in particular suggests at first sight the banal simplicity of an autograph album piece:

> 'Burn away, not rust away!
> So soon our life is past,'
> You said. But, dear, be kind to me,
> And do not burn too fast!

But it's not quite as transparent as it looks. None of these poems are. Note the use of "burn" instead of the conventional "wear" away; contrast the significance of burning—a sort of hot incandescence—with the familiar slow combustion of rust. And that is typical of R.G.H. His lines can be read for a subtle diffusion of meaning and the more they are read, the richer the meaning. But both these poets write of love as though the lovers do not exist in human contact with the physical contours of the world around them. The passion is, of course, universal. But since it is, in actuality, practised in a setting, one may presume that in a full life the setting does occasionally intrude. And the literary expression of an emotion stripped of the sun, sky, trees, rivers, sea-sands, mountains, the very air against which it is articulated seems to be but one half of the picture.

Leonard Mann's *The Delectable Mountains* are not of the "Whacko!" variety. Rather are they a spiritual eminence to be attained. As the psalmist sang: "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills", so Leonard Mann asks:

> What destiny we yet must dare
> Which dare we cannot till our feet have come
> Into the far country,
> And we stand on the delectable mountains?

The title poem which concludes with these lines is an interesting social document. Yet its author is, at his best, a halting poet, the cold precision of whose mind seems incapable of enriching his language with real poetic imagery. Many of his lines could almost be smoothed out into prose—almost, but not quite, for he gains his poetic effects by inversions, repetition and occasionally word-omission:

> Bill, there are signs here
> We took the right track
> At the fork where the track divided,
> And it was a confirmation
> Of our right judgment when
> Track thinned to nothing soon enough.

Nothing much there to stir the corpuscles, but a direct prosaic statement of a situation. He assumes the "delectable mountains" will be reached if

> . . . . . at times when halted
> By some obstacle we attack,
> A wind blows out of the far country.

That the same mountains may recede as we approach them does not seem to occur to him, a fact which reinforces the impression suggested by other poems that Leonard Mann's thoughts seldom carry him to the ultimate completion of an idea. Thus in "Bomber Crew" he likens a fleet of bombers to flies that "would sow with the maggots of death". After they have "laid all their heavy eggs", we are told that

> Of the city there was left
> Only the maggots' excrement.

A poetic conceit; if not a pretty one, at least it is a recognizable one. But any farmer knows that a blowflies' eggs or maggots (the terms are interchangeable in the poem) produce something besides maggots' excrement—to wit, another generation of maggots. Perhaps we are to reach the delectable mountains before this can happen!

The reader turns to Flexmore Hudson seeking the happy combination so far lacking: thought, form and music combined and unified. But there is disappointment here. Thought is present, most of it either rampageously protesting against things the poet doesn't like or emotionally embracing those

he does; it is, for the most part, thought without much penetration. Form is, at least in the later poems, forsworn for loose, long Whitmanish lines entirely devoid of Whitman's music, of which quality the verse contains practically nothing. In his earlier work, Flexmore Hudson seemed to be a young man enchanted with a world he was discovering for himself, interested in the process of discovery and interesting his readers with him. He now appears to be engaged in discovering himself to the world, a preoccupation far less interesting to his audience.

"My heart entreated for imperishable spring", he wrote a few years ago. But with growing acceptance of the inevitable, he added:

> But now regretlessly I fashion
> the song of how my old lament
> was changed by death and the years of sorrow
> into a quiet gentle content
> with transitory things.

This was a promising philosophy; it would have yielded poetry. But he has not been content to remain contemplative. Now he says, "Our words must burn!" Poets must cry aloud the wrongs of the world. A laudable idea, and one practised in the past by sincere poets with long-enduring effect upon human indignation. But they were poets who realized that if words were to burn they must, indeed, be burning words. Many of Mr. Hudson's most impassioned utterances are little more than the enraged prose of the tub-thumper:

> There are Jews not yet rotted in the graves of Warsaw
> who were dosed with castor-oil and forced to paddle naked in their excrement;
> then transported in winter in cattle-trucks,
> packed tight, standing knee-deep in chloride of lime.
> The dead would not drop. On arrival they were beaten
> with whips and steel rods . . .
> Soon after they were shot and burned, the wounded with the dead.

Whatever this is, it is not poetry. However true it is, it isn't poetry. And "soon after" isn't even good English.

In these four books one looks in vain for the singing poet. Kenneth MacKenzie sublimates human passion into rare poetic imagery, with a fine taste for language; R.G.H. imprisons it within the bars of rigid poetic quatrains and prunes it with verbal secateurs; Leonard Mann gropes through a world of machines for a vision; Flexmore Hudson stumbles unevenly over a fallow paddock of words which he fails to harrow to a fine, even tilth. But none of them sings.

Nor is there much evidence of the troubadour in H. M. Green's selection, *Australian Poetry, 1943.* It is, however, interesting to contrast this book with its immediate predecessors. Douglas Stewart's 1941 anthology was a compôte of pure poetry, with a touching lack of contemporary significance. R. D. FitzGerald's 1942 collection was an advance into the present, with some excellent samples of war poetry. This one is a light-hearted anthology, thoroughly pleasant to read and almost equally unimpressive as an indication of what Australian poets are thinking and writing today. One can scarcely believe that the young war poets have become so suddenly inarticulate. Their only representative is Shawn O'Leary, and his poem "The Bayonet" does not do him justice. Of the remainder, the best are those which best fit the mood of the anthologist—A. D. Hope's clever "The Return from the Freudian Isles", Douglas Stewart's amusing "The Bishop", and Olive Hopegood's "Feathers":

> Let us put feathers
> in our hair and dance
> and touch the moon with a feather.

Which, in the main, is what this book does.

Of the four poets reviewed above, all are represented except Flexmore Hudson. But we should have thought R. D. FitzGerald, Kenneth Slessor, Rex Ingamells, A. G. Austin, to name only a few, could not with justice be omitted from a representative volume of contemporary Australian verse.

JOHN K. EWERS.

HAPPY FEW

We Were the Rats. By Lawson Glassop. (Angus and Robertson, 1945. 9s. 6d.)

Mr. Lawson Glassop's first published novel is heralded by the most resonant of Norman Lindsay's golden trumpets. But the reader finds that, far from being the great book that the introduction describes, it is disappointingly written, and as a novel, not unduly promising; nor will it satisfy fully those who seek a comprehensive account of the stand at Tobruk, since only in Chapter XXVII does Mr. Glassop's hero reach the fortress, and only a third of the book deals with his adventures there. There is no doubting the author's sincerity of purpose; he presents army life with ruthless frankness. His hero is a cricketing celebrity and furniture salesman in a New South Wales coastal town; the book describes his life there, his enlistment in the Seventh Division soon after the outbreak of war, his training in Australia, his voyage to Palestine, his participation, now transferred to the Ninth Division, in the retreat to Tobruk early in 1941, his experiences during the siege, his brief and lurid sojourn in Cairo after being withdrawn from Tobruk, his return to Australia and marriage; we last see him setting out to serve in the North. It must be said that there is little in the book that is strikingly original; indeed, many of the incidents, like the opinions and phrasing of the hero, are shockingly stilted, trite and theatrical. We are presented with such clichés of event as the young man's haunting a theatre to win the notice of his first love (though by no means his first lover), who is a chorus girl in a musical comedy; his fist-fight with a soldier who immediately becomes, and stays, his best friend; the breaking up of the fight by the C.O., who is none other than a friend of the hero's father in the last Great War; the hallucination by which Clive, one of the hero's friends, sees on a headstone near Tel Aviv (erected in memory of a fallen Light-Horseman of 1917) his own name and the date of his coming death; the toughening of the morale of the hero's section during the worst days of Tobruk by his spouting of quotations from Shakespeare and Rupert Brooke (an unbelievably unreal and gawkish scene); and the hero's refusal of the M.M. lest his sweetheart be tormented by the knowledge that he was in the front line.

On the other hand, this very lack of artistry in organizing events into a coherent and convincing plot gives the book what virtue it has, not as a novel, but as a piece of accurate and frank, if ill-balanced reportage. The narrative proceeds in clear, bald and sharply-etched phrases, liberally and nauseatingly stiffened with repellent detail of the horrors of army life and the lustful joys of leave. Mr. Glassop has a leaning towards the short, simple sentence, the almost unbroken succession of which produces a clumsy, rhythmless, rather wearisome effect; and for variety he relies upon long (far too long) stretches of authentic A.I.F. language, the filth and monotony of which rather sicken those who know what it all means and both horrify and mystify those who do

not. The less romantic side of military life has never been so frankly or so accurately presented in print, and of these too often ignored details the book is a very complete and striking record. Yet where the lack of civilized values is so strikingly portrayed, the courage, endurance, comradeship and self-conscious quixotry of the diggers, however ineptly presented, shine out by contrast.

In trying to abstain from sentimentalism over the heroes of Tobruk (and this is the only justification for Mr. Glassop's embarrassing frankness), the author has overpainted the worse side of their characters; there are too few characters in the book with any sense of decency, and the author seems incapable of presenting without unreality the finer moments of any of them. Perhaps it would be charitable to ascribe these faults of style and emphasis to the character who tells the story, Mick Reynolds—as unpleasant a mixture of conceit, cynicism, self-conscious immorality, deceitfulness and affected nonchalance as ever aroused a reader's antagonism; but there is no denying that the character is vividly real and complete. The other characters are fairly well drawn, with the exception of the would-be humorist, Harday, the sensitive Clive Fenstone, and the vague and unaccountable heroine. In a few places, such as the description of the hero's reaction to his first wound, the writing is very telling. The novel, however, lacks a central theme; incident follows incident and detail detail without selective emphasis or comprehensive purpose; the book trails off uninterestingly at the end, leaving little impression of unity. In its nature, of course, the holding of Tobruk is material not well adapted for carrying the story to a telling climax, except perhaps as a psychological study of the cumulative effect of strain and hardship—and this the author has not attempted.

It is a pity that so much vulgarity in matter and bad taste in presentation should mar what could have been a fine piece of reporting; for there is no doubt that Mr. Glassop has captured the authentic conversation and attitudes of mind of soldiers and civilians in the early years of the war with complete realism and fidelity—where, that is, he is content to describe and report, and not try to work up "effects". I called his book unpromising as a novel because the qualities required in a novel writer are precisely those in which Mr. Glassop's book is weakest. To use a distinction of J. B. Priestley, he can record and confess; he has not yet shown that he can create.

W. Milgate.

POETRY ANNUAL

Australian Poetry, 1944. Selected by R. G. Howarth. (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1945. 4s. 6d.)

It is a sign of the times that 1944 already seems a great while ago. Some of the poems included in this selection have been familiar for so long that it comes as a bit of a shock to be reminded that they are barely a year old. The latter end of 1945 does seem rather late for an anthology labelled as this one is;* but as things are in the printing trade, it seems we must only say grace and be thankful to have it at all.

* Published in July.—Editor.

Not all of the poems first appeared in 1944. The inclusion of Michael Thwaites' "Milton Blind" (or rather a fragment of it) justifies itself by its appearance in book form recently, but the poem first appeared in the *Rhodes Review* before the war. Nevertheless it was worth including; a fine piece of traditional blank-verse writing, decorous and pleasing to the ear in spite of a little faltering.

There is the usual handful of nature-lyrics, and these on the whole are middlingly good. Norma Davis is not a good poet, and does not, in my opinion, begin the selection well. When you have read through it, however, it becomes apparent that Mr. Howarth has saved most of his stronger stuff to strengthen the latter end. A good policy, I think; better than scattering all the pearls in the opening pages.

There are a few very fine lyrics here as well as many that will pass. The selection is discriminating, and has been guided not merely by an intelligent judgment, but by a listening ear too. The ear is never content to condone the all-too-plentiful kind of pretentious nonsense that masquerades its inanity beneath the flow of pretty syllables, but Mr. Howarth readily admits obscurity where he feels it to be poetically effective. I would myself have felt some doubt about including the first of Geoffrey Dutton's poems:

> The hero slid the landscape round his wing,
> Won his soft love
> By sentiment of violin,
> Tore fabric from eight deaths above.

And yet Mr. Howarth manages to fit this into a context of contemporary feeling; it is right enough in its place. As to nonsense pure and simple, Peter Hopegood excels at it, and the last piece, "Betty Martin's Summer Song", charmingly saves the anthology from any possible trace of heavy solemnity.

That is not to suggest that it lacks weight. R. D. FitzGerald's "Heemskerck Shoals" is of the stature of a major poem, a work which flows beautifully in its half-colloquial idiom. It is undoubtedly the best thing in the book; but it would be the best thing in a good many possible anthologies. Of shorter pieces there is the beautifully sensitive and pathetic "Beach Burial" of Kenneth Slessor, and a beautifully phrased "Sonnet" (erotic, as usual) by Kenneth MacKenzie. These latter both show to better advantage, I think, by standing apart from other poems in their own manner. The finest of the short poems is Eric Irvin's "Midnight Patrol".

Very few poets in Australia are capable of writing a purely lyrical line, and, having written it, of sustaining the note. Donovan Clarke, for instance, manages to get a certain way with

> Out of a fold in time come silently fluttering
> Moth emblems that hint at the limits of our despair—

but the musical continuity goes to pieces, and he rather weakly returns *da capo* to get the same effect over again with the same words. Leonard Mann's "City Cemetery" is a musical fragment which doesn't let down; but the achievement is rare. H. M. Vintner's "Song" ("Sleep quietly now, my darling, while you can") manages to sustain the lyrical impulse over a whole stanza; but in taking up the pattern again for a second he loses the pitch of it and writes a little out of tune. I think it is a pity there is not more poetry in Australia of a semi-serious kind, in which the lyrical impulse can play and amuse itself at the same time as it is practising its technique. There is some of it here, and good of its kind, in Douglas Stewart's spring-song "The Dosser in

Springtime" and (better, I think, though less fanciful) A. D. Hope's "Standardization".

This collection of verses is pretty soundly representative of the best in contemporary Australian verse. It is perhaps a little conservative. It minimizes the special interests—Jindies and other forms of cocoon-poetry—but that seems right enough. No stranger, making his acquaintance with Australian poetry in this book, need draw any but sound conclusions. There are no serious cracks in this poetical pot: if you tap it it will give a good sound.

BRIAN ELLIOTT.

Australian Poetry, 1944

Corrections: Page 27, line 13, for "blind," read "blind."; l. 16, for "light" read "light,"; l. 17, for "dawn" read "Dawn"; page 28, l. 18, omit "like"; p. 46, l. 1, for "The power to" read "The power is"; p. 59, l. 3, for "De Quiros's" read "De Quiros' ".—EDITOR.

SMALL TOWN TALK

Now That We're Laughing. By Margaret Trist. (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1945. 7s. 6d.)

Readers of Margaret Trist's short stories will know her jovial ability to give them life, if not in the raw, at least in the grubby, sticky and sluttish. Her first novel, *Now That We're Laughing,* adds to her menagerie the Hendersons, a household pullulating with babies in the way or on the way, strident with the clamours of uninhibited adolescent femininity, and exhibiting an obtrusion of bosoms rather than of paternal authority. Ascending the somewhat rickety social ladder, we meet the Carlingfords, a household hardly less chaotic and polyphiloprogenitive, but operating within, if only just within, the orthodox codes of middle-class behaviour. Above them again are the Blairs (with only one child), seated on their delectable mountain of snobbery, whence the clear mountain air enables Mrs. Blair to despise the rest of the town with a good, if a somewhat acid, conscience. And milling around the three families are the Toomeys and the Talbots, the small boys and the large matrons, who form the cosmos of the small country town of Upper Glen. The centre of the tangle is the love-story—in so far as it is a story—of Jimmy Blair (on leave from the R.A.A.F.) and Sheila Carlingford, with Joyce Henderson as the horse of a different colour, as it were.

Of the excellence of the parts which go to make up the book there is no doubt. The warm earthiness amid which the Hendersons live and move and propagate their being, and the vague miasma through which the Carlingfords grope their way, are happily drawn; and the air of life in Upper Glen, with its mixture of pathos and vicious spite, of boredom and the climactic "sports" or "social", is well caught. With these must be mentioned the physical surroundings of the hot mountain summer—the blue and gold of blazing days, the movement and shape of flame in sunlight, the dark relief of night. Some doubt enters, however, when one tries to think of the book as a whole. The essence of the story is "boy meets girl"; and though this is translated into the free-spoken idiom which one supposes, on Miss Trist's evidence, to be normal among the modern young, and though there is a great deal of searching speculation about just what it is a man wants of a woman and vice versa, I do not think that the book amounts to more than that. Perhaps the trouble is (or am I exhibiting antiquity and prejudice?) that the sexual problems of adolescence, whether modest or no better than it ought to be, are

of little real interest save to the participants. The authoress herself describes Jimmy Blair as not yet a man and no longer a boy. That is just the point—that, apart from the comic characters, none of the persons in the book is definite enough or real enough to stir more than a passing interest.

Still, this is perhaps raising issues more ponderous and heavy-handed than the book warrants. It is lively, funny, neatly written (apart from some slight pretentiousness in the serious passages) and most certainly brings the reader within the "We" of the title.

S. MUSGROVE.

POETRY IN PROGRESS

Poetry: The Quarterly of Australian Verse, Numbers 12-15. Edited by Flexmore Hudson. (Lucindale, S.A., 1944-5. 2s. each.)

Flexmore Hudson is to be congratulated on the catholicity of his taste. The general standard of the contributions is not very high, but the editor seems happily free of bias towards any particular kind of poetry, the printing of guest prefaces being one indication of the variety of material presented. These prefaces are difficult to review, for one stubs one's toes against such important artistic issues that in some cases it would take twenty closely-written pages to discuss adequately one paragraph.

Three of the prefaces are concerned with the poet as a man. Most of the qualities, for instance, that Donovan Clarke enumerates as peculiar to the poet would not be inappropriate in any responsible human being, although why a poet, or any one else, should always efface himself is not clear. The principal claim made for the poet in particular is that he should be a prophet. Mr. Clarke, however, uses "prophet" as a synonym for "reformer", and asserts a connection between Shelley's dictum that the poet is the unacknowledged legislator of the world and his own view that the poet in society plays a role similar to that of prophetic dreams, premonitions and so on in our own lives. It would require more than a paragraph or two to prove any connection between these ideas, quite apart from the extremely dubious importance of second sight in an artist.

J. R. Hervey makes the big statement that great poets have always been great men, and explains his terms thus: "they were great in intellectual power, in imaginative scope, in their passion for knowledge, in their dedication to truth and song, in their response to beauty." All these qualities, except perhaps dedication to song (and this is a vague phrase) could be found in a scientist, and, on the other hand, is there any connection between Herrick's lyrical poetry and his intellectual power? Mr. Hervey is quite wrong in saying that many an educated or cultured person can produce good lines, but the result is not poetry. The result could well be good poetry, but the author need not be a poet. The poet—and there are bad as well as good poets—is concerned always with trying to capture a thought or emotion in what will seem an inevitable form, in transmuting experience into the "silver syllables" that Day Lewis speaks of in the passage Mr. Hervey somewhat unexpectedly cites, unexpectedly since Lewis makes a clear distinction between a man as lover and a man as poet.

A harmlessly egotistic essay, interesting mainly for its autobiographical detail, is contributed by Eric Irvin, and the last of the preface-writers, James Devaney, writes a somewhat incoherent "Preface to Poetry" in which, anxious

to be fair to both the traditionalists and the moderns, he concedes a little unnecessarily that there can be good in any sort of poetry, concluding that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In the course of his essay Mr. Devaney takes up boomerangs for the Jindyworobaks and, although he tries to have it both ways, pointing out first of all that even if we have no moated granges or Norman Invasions, we at least have the aboriginals, he nevertheless makes the reasonable observation that the aboriginal theme "is but a touchstone or symbol of Australianism, the having roots in one's own country".

Once this concession is made, criticism may open its eyes and look steadily at Rex Ingamells's "Cities in Alkira", a poem that is often embarrassing in its primitiveness of expression and sentiment. The poet allows himself such lines as:

> This
> is a place, indeed, where nothing seems amiss

and:

> Cemented footpath, composition road
> and wires and wireless, messages in code;
> such things as make the white man think that he
> has won this Land and conquered Destiny.

The theme of the poem is that our cities are concentration camps where "The Banks are mighty, O the Banks have power", and until Alkira, dream spirit of Australia, enters our lives in the form of pictures of the Flinders and the Kimberleys hung upon the walls, and mallee and saltbush on the films, we are in a prison of concrete and custom. Even if one agrees with Mr. Ingamells that the Banks cannot win our hearts, the suggested solution seems a little too simple for our complex troubles. One wonders whether the Americans are to escape their concentration camps by invoking the spirits of Red Indians and hanging pictures of sage-brush on their walls. A more acceptable solution to the problem is embodied in George Farwell's "The Secret Wind", in which, after somewhat unfairly invoking Alkira to inspire the Unions, he declares:

> But riches are not pawned acres tilled,
> not banks' marble nor tiered concrete shelves,
> not spires, but secret towers men build
> far within themselves.

For some, that secret tower will be built by Alkira, but Alkira should not be recommended as a panacea.

Ken Barratt's "Alcheringa" (dream time of long ago) at first invites the same comment but disarms the critic by its concluding note of serene acceptance: even though we are a people that serves time and fears it, there still remains

> Alcheringa, the dreamtime, the everlasting past-time,
> with to-day the wave that moves onwards,
> without disturbing the waters.

Mr. Barratt strikes one as a poet who can command one or two arresting phrases but who does not quite know what to say. Consequently he writes the emptily turgid "On Such a Night" and a silly poem, "The Beaches", whose forty-eight lines are summed up in the final quatrain:

> And because of the beaches, they walked proudly in Rome,
> thinking, "You have St Peters and the Coliseum,
> but we have the beaches,
> The eternal beaches of home".

A more reasonable longing for Australia is expressed in Flexmore Hudson's "Pranged", in which an airman discovers that his wife has become to him not only the woman he loves but also a symbol of the beauty of his native land. The poem, however, is sentimental and melodramatic, and suffers from a fault common to many of the poems in these numbers—diffuseness. One may concede with James Devaney that there is "no reason why the finest poetry should not

be written without metre, rhyme, regular form": nevertheless it remains a platitude that once no fixed external form is imposed, the necessity for some internal discipline becomes all the greater. Most of the *Poetry* poems that are written in unrhymed irregular lines and stanzas sprawl flatly along from line to line, and, if set out in prose form, immediately lose their specious appearance of poetry.

Gina Ballantyne's "There is No Escape" is a partial exception: the dead metaphors towards the end of the first stanza spoil the effect of the carefully disordered rhythm, but the poem gains coherence through repetition and the fairly consistent elaboration of the fundamental metaphor. Perhaps the most impressive of the non-traditional poems is William Hart-Smith's "Elegy for a Modern Child". The poet chooses a difficult subject, the growth of fear in a child, and develops his theme through a series of images of which the last two are peculiarly horrifying. Through the repetition of phrases like "Once, once upon time" and an occasional naïve use of words like the "right" in

> It was in summer time when the huge white magnolia blooms
> Unfolded right on the sill

the poet well suggests an atmosphere of childhood. The chief weakness of the poem is its ending, an incongruous mixture of measured language and casual conversational abbreviations.

The war poems do not impress, being at worst undistinguished rehashings of the old question of who was to blame, and at best accurate reporting like John Quinn's "A Foxhole for the Night".

There remain three poems that deserve individual mention. Robert Crossland writes a diverting poem about a flea, using rhyming couplets to crystallise out an acid solution of parody of the popular song "Trees" and a twentieth century version of the erotic metaphors favoured by some of the seventeenth century poets. Judith Wright achieves a memorable image in "The Clock" when, speaking of the desire to return to childhood, she asks:

> Does the heart know no better than to pray
> that time unwind its coil, the bone unbuild
> till that lost world sit like a fruit in the hand—
> till the felled trees rise upright where they lay
> and leaves and birds spring on them as they stand?

And A. D. Hope contributes the concentrated and lucid "X-Ray Photograph", in which human beings are melted down, first with the X-ray, then with the rays of the mind, until lovers become two columns of interstitial dust yearning for each other in lonely space. Materialistic, certainly, but written with an admirable precision and macabre clarity.

From No. 12 to No. 15 various improvements appear: a welcome table of contents, a clearer and more interesting typographical arrangement, and, in the last issue, a group of reviews. These reviews are so lively, and good poems so hard to find, that the editor is perhaps justified in devoting thirty pages of No. 15 to critical prose and only thirteen to original verse.

DAWN WOOD.

UP AND DOWN

Pillar to Post: A Collection of Australian Short Stories Selected at Random. By Harley Matthews. (Frank Johnson, Sydney, 1945. 5s.)

The title of this anthology is a travesty of that borne by a well-known annual collection, and, apparently to drive this point home, it is upended and printed on the back cover. There is a further significance. One is credibly informed that the contents are all stories rejected from that other anthology—kicked, as it were, "from pillar to post". This must of course not be taken into account when estimating their merits, but it can at least be kept in mind. *C— to C—* is bound to be to some extent personal, the result of individual choice, and latterly its weakness seems to be that the net is not cast wide enough, the successive compilers tending to include only items from sources with which they are most familiar, in addition to selecting from samples offered by authors.

Pillar to Post takes in both published and unpublished work. Thus "The Fairy in the Suitcase", from Ronald McCuaig's *Tales Out of Bed,* appears, and there is a story by Murray Gordon which almost certainly has not yet figured in print elsewhere. Some of the contents, like this, seem to be recent; others of fair age. At least one bears signs of revision up to date.

The best stories, I should say, are Gordon's "The Heart of Darwin", a suddenly grim study of that pseudo-comic phenomenon, tropical dementia; Sally Baker's well-written "Epitaph for a Tyrant" (one of those martinet grandmothers); Will Lawson's amusing—and moving—portrait of an old Maori princess, "'Full Speed Ahead, Ma!'"; and Dal Stivens's "The Bull Calf", carefully done, stroke by stroke. These would do credit to any collection. George Farwell almost brings it off in "Wednesdays", a Woolloomooloo idyll in reverse. Audrey Francis's "Born in the Blood" and Delys Cross's "To Have and to Hold" are cut to pattern, with the usual relief or all-coming-right ending. Frank Ryland's "Unclaimed" satisfies the reader by all coming wrong, as he expects. J. Gaby's "The Knife"* is a sea-faring *narrative,* merely, with no insight into human nature. Captain Jack Hamilton's "His Dream Ship" carries pathos to the limit of broken-heart decease.

I have these criticisms to make of the remaining stories:

Dymphna Cusack's "'You Won't Mind the Ghost!'." Miss Robinson is not the first old maid of fiction to entertain a ghostly lover. She varies it perhaps by also observing the proprieties. But, if so, why should she inform and warn her girl visitor of the ghost? Anxious as she is that the girl should not see him, she would surely keep him quite dark. Miss Cusack here throws the story away for the sake of surprise, of shock—"You're *sure* you won't mind the ghost?"

Dulcie Deamer's "The Light-Bringer". Whatever knowledge or divination of the remote past Miss Deamer exercises, it is surely not a fact that light and fire were unknown before a certain primitive man accidentally struck flint and iron together and kindled a blaze. In the primeval "world-forest", were there never any forest fires? Did no ancestral Bo-Bo ever pick up the remains of an animal after the passing of one such fire, lick his hand and find it good? Apart from this, there is a tolerable imaginative suggestion of the primal relationships between man, earth and animal.

* It is not stated, and I did not know till after this was written, that Gaby's story had been awarded first prize in the Fellowship of Australian Writers' competition in 1941.

Miles Franklin's "'From Merely Looking On'". Bloomsbury of the 'twenties, Sydney of the 'thirties (or even 'forties) get mixed up together. Miss Franklin draws an odd portrait of a local poet, whose gods are Hemingway, Joyce and Eliot (why not?—except that two of these are prose-writers), who is also a "queen",* and speaks the most astonishing lingo: "You have deceived me, madam, with your demand for a wedding ring, and I thought it was my art you admired. My lucky stars have saved me from cuckoldry—an experience that even those most avid of life seek to evade." "Literary", "melodramatic", Miss Franklin rightly calls this; but is it Bloomsbury (even of the 'twenties)? Is it Sydney? Nineteenth-century stage, traditionary, I'd say. And there is an atmosphere of the theatre—of Victorian farce or even of Restoration comedy, strangely enough—about this supposedly modern and serious story. People drop in at a flat where by architectural convenience the rooms are cubicles for eavesdropping; having overheard enough, they confront each other dramatically; a grand dénouement gathers them all together. Then, tragedy. It is a good story in essence, but not handled in a sufficiently up-to-date and natural way to pass scrutiny.

"I am Tried by the Insects", which I mention for completeness, is one of Les Robinson's gay nightmares. Better to wake with Lon than sleep with Les!

R.G.H.

INVETERATE HUMORIST

The Cousin From Fiji. By Norman Lindsay. (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1945. 8s. 6d.)

These days there are people who regard Mr. Norman Lindsay with a great suspicion, which arises, I imagine, from the fact that Mr. Lindsay enjoys the game of literary polemics and the full-throated phrase. In one of his recent statements, for instance, he applauded in a fellow-writer a view of life as a place where one must obey the rule of "Kill or be killed". This is certainly a Prussian pronouncement and its British counterpart would be "Bluff or be bluffed"—at any rate, if one is to judge from the traditions of English humorous writing. These traditions *The Cousin From Fiji* nobly exemplifies.

This novel concerns itself with many kinds of bluff and the characters are only explicable and assessable in terms of bluff, in terms of the contrast between their social and their real selves. To call Lindsay's book, as the dust-cover does, "a little master-piece of period writing" is to libel it terribly, because the phrase suggests carefully assembled and multiform creatures moving against odd backgrounds. Timelessness is the essence of Mr. Lindsay's lively conception of society. A timeless and impish sex-instinct governs everybody—as in the Norman Lindsay pictorial art—and Ballarat in the 1890's, as in this latest novel, or Ancient Legend-Land or Modern King's Cross is just incidental. Walt Whitman watched the machinery of sex, D. H. Lawrence the individual and isolated surge, Lindsay likes to watch the bricks being knocked from all kinds of façades and is, in consequence, our deepest Australian humorist.

Amongst the characters of *The Cousin From Fiji* there are certain nice proportions in bluff. George Domkin and Gussie Maguire are the most convincing pretenders—George, the tight-lipped and mannered fellow of the local professional world, Gussie, with a gentility perhaps only Lindsay can so cruelly depict—but they are bound at the end by the most violent desire and detestation. Cecelia, the widow from Fiji, embodies more fully Lindsay's comedic conception, for she gives sex a Billy Burke inconsequence and lightness,

* The writer uses this word, but will not print "whore". The most she will do is to take asterisks!

and, far from damning the tortured Hilary Shadlet, liberates and magnifies him. If there is some ferocity in the delineation of George, there is a conquering humour in Hilary's idealisation of the femininely and friendlily designing Cecelia, in his clandestine meetings with her at the side-fence behind the rockery, where his termagant sister may be presumed not to probe, and, especially, for all Lindsay's lusty and marvellously effective Hogarthianism, in the Melbourne brothel scenes when Hilary is determined to prove himself to himself. The only person we are allowed really to pity is the girl Ella, who comes with her mother from Fiji expecting to find all adventure in Ballarat. Ella has yet to establish herself as an individual and is still in the stage of bluffing herself. To me, Lindsay treats this problem of adolescence with unusual understanding and in this, as well as in the happy ending he dispenses for the girl, reveals the sympathetic heart within the ironist.

Always the question arises of how to evaluate a book like *The Cousin From Fiji*. It may be that the basic principle of Lindsay's humour applies also in the critical sphere. How far does any critic let himself be bluffed by the serious mien, by an unbendingly dignified treatment of themes. Writers like Norman Lindsay and Eric Linklater observe the caprices of the lowest common social denominator; they look downwards from our normal position of fair social stability. Men like, say, Charles Morgan seek and speculate about a higher and more problematical common immanence. Which school is the worthier artistically? There could be argument. There can be little argument that, despite all extremes of farce, we recognise more of the world and people we know in the first group and that, to put much the same thing a trifle less invidiously, Norman Lindsay cuts closer to the real bone than the Australian novel is in the habit of doing.

O. N. Burgess.

A WORLD FOR HEROES

Two Frontiers. By E. J. Brady. (Frank Johnson, Sydney and Melbourne, 1945. 10s. 6d.)

The author's foreword to this lively book of 315 pages is brisk and informative. It states that "characters and events in this book are not fictitious. Its scenes are laid in Eire, on American and Australian frontiers, and in the North Pacific. Most of its action takes place during the fabulous 'fifties and sensational 'sixties; days of Eldorados, immigrants, outlaws, and wind-driven ships." The author goes on to write that he "is indebted to MSS of his late father for source material".

Truly, there is considerable source material as well as material for sauce in the well-known Brady style. There is sufficient material tucked away in corners to provide a dozen short stories, and, in the full view of the reader, characters and events are heaped several novels high. Mr. Brady has written somewhat impatiently it appears at times, for he writes with something of the verve of the poet, but with very little of the quiet tenacity of the novelist. The characters and the events are rapidly sketched, and often in a brilliant fashion, but, although the picturesque phrase is satisfactory and even excellent for a description of scene or action, it is too condensed to present character or plot satisfactorily.

At all times the narrative is racy, and this quality is its main force, apart from the unusual nature of its subject matter. Yet raciness can become a trifle high-pitched, and can wear down a reader's interest, if the excitement is too much in the writer and too little in the material. At times I feel that

the Irishman's charming gift of fantastic exaggeration has been worn thin by Mr. Brady. I think most people would agree that hyperbole does not bear a great deal of repetition. Its striking force is felt most when it is least expected.

On page 192 Mr. Brady refers to "the subject of our narrative". This phrase may indicate the close, personal relationship of the writer to his story. The subject, in fact, is rarely present. He is, at the most, a thin cord which holds together the bright beads of anecdote, commentary, exposition, potted history.

When the reader has finished the book he will probably ask what made endurable the hardships of pioneer life on the frontier and on the furthermost verges of the sea. Mr. Brady has not thought it necessary to attempt an answer to this difficult question, although the personal form in which he wrote made comment possible. The answer, of course, would demand a careful enquiry into the social complex, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the explanation would have something to do with the great gambles which the new worlds offered men a hundred years ago, and, also, something to do with the mateship experienced by small groups of men in a world where personal valour, skill and initiative counted so much.

I would sum up *Two Frontiers,* by E. J. Brady, as being far more important than its faults. It will help to show us how quickly the heroic world of our immediate forefathers has given way to the impersonal, mechanised world of to-day.

E. McLeod.

SOCIAL REALISM

Australian New Writing. Edited by Katharine Susannah Prichard, George Farwell, Bernard Smith and Ken Levis. Number Three. (Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1945. 1s.)

With reference to a poem whose authorship had been unknown, the editors of *Australian New Writing* exclaim, "If only it had been written by an ironworker!" This interest in a writer as a worker with a viewpoint rather than as an artist does not seem to have affected the choice of contributions on the whole, although emphasis on social content mars the stories by Katharine Susannah Prichard, who is one of the editors, and John Morrison. Miss Prichard's "Hero of the Mines" tells of the death of a young miner who sacrificed himself to save some fellow workers when some old skips broke loose; the lad is actually sacrificed in two ways, for the author simply uses him as a peg on which to hang the moral that mine owners should make improvements. "All Through the Night", which won the Fellowship of Australian Writers' Production Front competition, might have been a good story if Mr. Morrison had not written it for this competition, and if he had exercised a little more self-discipline. A vigorous, realistic and eminently readable account of a night's work in the hold of a ship is spoiled by self-conscious defences of the working man and frequent passages of unimpressive fulsomeness ("Portentous moment! A new day is being born"). Among the stories without a message there are two that make a unified and clear impression: C. P. McCausland's "A Day's Work", a vivid and impartial sketch of a clash between a school inspector and a young teacher, and Stan Parkes's "No Gammon", a delightful *tour de force* told in the aboriginal brand of pidgin English.

Of the topical poems, C. P. McCausland's "Artillery" is perhaps the only one that is more than occasional; from the well-controlled expressionistic verse there emerges a convincing picture of the primitive horror and the passionless efficiency that are blended in a modern war. The poems by Leonard Mann and V. Williams are sincere, but lack the identity of form and matter that can turn heartfelt emotion into poetry. "To The Soldiers of To-day" jogs along mechanically, owing to the combination of short lines and couplet rhymes. "Not Again" takes the form of a series of countryside images that seldom evoke a picture in the mind; their intellectual meaning only is apprehended, so that many of the comparisons seem in no way inevitable within the poem, and often appear to be dragged in for the sake of the rhyme:

> **Bush grown and useless as a sunken hull;**
> **Farmhouse with staring windows like a skull—**

Arthur Murphy's "Hotel, Mildura", which hardly gets beyond photographic realism, must be mentioned because of its very odd last verse.

The critical articles, though written competently, are without distinction. This criticism, indeed, holds true of many of the contributions in this number; the writers are making a vigorous effort to come to grips with the world of reality, but in most cases, as their words are neither incisive nor vivid, their works lack atmosphere.

DAWN WOOD.

SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Some Australian Adventurers. Edited by Enid Moodie Heddle. (Longmans.)

This anthology of prose extracts from works by Australians would be particularly useful as supplementary reading in Australian schools, for children between the ages of ten and fifteen. The editor probably had this important public in mind when she selected the pieces. She is not concerned at all with instruction, and has made no attempt to provide the youthful readers with examples from only the best Australian prose works. Her aim is simply to stimulate them. She wishes them to catch something of the spirit of adventure and joy in discovery, which seem to her to be characteristic not only of the writers she has chosen but also of Australians as a people. Most of the writers have been eager travellers in Australia or nearby, and they report about or relate tales of places and events they know. Such authors are Idriess, Hides, Mawson, Kingsford Smith and Henry Lawson. Their material covers real and imaginary adventures from legendary tales of the aboriginal to modern tales of land, sea, and air.

Each narrative is prefaced by a short note on the author's writings, with a relevant detail or two about his interests, as well as a list of books dealing with a similar theme. For example, the extract from *Lasseter's Last Ride* is described as "one of Ion Idriess' romances of Australia, based on real experience". A biographical note about Idriess follows, showing that he has knocked about in search of tin, gold, sandalwood and a living generally. Several of his books are mentioned. A separate paragraph lists other books on Central Australia, such as Blakely's *Hard Liberty,* Terry's *Sand and Sun,* and Hill's *The Great Australian Loneliness.*

The Education Gazette, N.S.W., recommends this book for libraries in secondary schools.

E. MCLEOD.

TRADITION AND INDIVIDUALITY

English Literature. By B. Ifor Evans. (British Life and Thought Series, Published for the British Council by Longmans Green and Co., 1944. 1s.)

Some Extracts and Comments

"In this long-continued and voluminous literature there recur certain characteristics which give it unity, and in many ways these permanent elements are illustrative of the temperament of the English people themselves. . . . I would place first its length and the continuity of its tradition. It is typical and suggestive that the English themselves have usually neither recognised this nor valued it adequately. Many histories of English literature begin with Geoffrey Chaucer, and describe him as 'the father' of English literature. Chaucer died in 1400. At a modest reckoning there were six centuries of English literature before Chaucer, indeed as many centuries before him as there have been after him. Why the English have been so indifferent to their own literary origins is difficult to determine. The earlier centuries of our national literature, though known to scholars, have made little impression on the popular mind. . . . Despite its length, the tradition of English literature has possessed unity to a notable degree. The general features which constitute that unity are difficult to isolate, and my attempt here must obviously be incomplete and open to criticism. I would in the first place instance as an enduring characteristic the belief which the English have maintained in the individual man. . . . Very early in English literature can be heard the voice of the individual man, and it is a voice that, once heard, is never to be silenced. . . . This faith in the individual life is probably the most permanent and secure element in the Englishman's unwritten spiritual creed. It enters into his fiction, his drama, his poetry: it informs much of his history, and accounts for the English passion for biography and autobiography. . . . The happiest future for English literature seems to me to lie in a due recognition of this long tradition combined with a genuine respect for the individual."

"English verse is meagre in mystical and religious themes." Langland, Milton, Donne, George Herbert and Hopkins are mentioned, but not—as one might expect—Southwell, Vaughan, Traherne, Crashaw, Habington, Herrick and all the others of the seventeenth century, with Blake and Smart in the eighteenth century. The omission of even a reference to such true mystics as Vaughan, Traherne and Blake is hard to understand. And for the religious tradition in poetry Professor Evans might consult *The Oxford Book of Mystical Verse* and the Everyman's Library *Book of Religious Poetry.*

On page 21 an "as" seems to have dropped out: the second sentence from the top should perhaps run: "The romantic element, for instance, has been present in our literature in some form or another since the Middle Ages, but it has never been so closely defined as in France, nor has the distinction of classical and romantic been so strictly and logically maintained *as* in France and Germany."

R.G.H.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

I Hear the Tramp of Millions, by F. Oswald Barnett, illustrated by Andor Mészáros. (Rawson's Book Shop, Melbourne; Angus and Robertson, 1945, 3s. 9d.)

My 'Pin-Up' Man, and Other Poems, by Myra Steer. (Author, Gympie, Q., 1945.)

Not for Fools, by Leon Batt. (Second edition, Pertinent Publishing Co., Sydney, 1945.)

New Weapons of the Spirit, by Beryl Halinbourg. (Author, Melbourne, 1945.)

Ride On Stranger, by Kylie Tennant. (Sirius Publishing Co., Sydney, 1945.)

Preparation for Peace: Some Wartime Addresses, by Lord Wakehurst, K.C.M.G. (Angus and Robertson, 1945, 3s. 6d.)

The Digger: A Study in Democracy, by A. G. Butler, D.S.O. (Angus and Robertson, 1945, 4s. 6d.)

Australia's Post-War Economy: Papers Read at the Eleventh Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science. (Australasian Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1945.)

Poems of War and Peace, by Maurice Biggs. (Angus and Robertson, 1945.)

A Soldier's Miscellany, by Eric Irvin. (Angus and Robertson, 1945.)

An Introduction to Thomas Mann; Joris Karl Huysmans: A Study, by F. J. H. Letters. (St. Vincent's Boys' Home, Westmead, 1945; Author, Armidale.)

Blue Prints, and Other Verses, by Donovan Clarke, second edition. (Melbourne University Press, 1945, 2s.)

Coast of Tragedy; Who Travels Alone, by Frank S. Greenop. (K. G. Murray Publishing Co., 1944, 8s. 6d., 10s. 6d.)

Each New Dawn: A Novel of Papua, by Burton Graham. (F. H. Johnston Publishing Co., Sydney, 1944, 7s. 6d.)

Poetry: The Australian Quarterly of Verse, edited by Flexmore Hudson, Number 16 (Editor, Lucindale, S.A., 1945, 2s.)

Arna, Journal of the Faculty of Arts, University of Sydney, 1945, edited by Rita Westerland and Val Ackerman.

Australian Sketches, by Stephen Kotze, translated and adapted by L. L. Politzer; *Leichhardt Letters,* translated by L. L. Politzer. (Pan Publishers, Melbourne, 1945.)

Creative Writing in Australia: A Selective Survey, by John K. Ewers. (Georgian House, Melbourne, 1945, 4s. 6d.)

Barjai, edited by Laurence Collinson and Barrie Reed, Number 19. (Brisbane, 1945, 2s.)

Interim, edited by A. Wilber Stevens and Elizabeth Dewey Stevens, Volume Two, Number One. (Seattle, Washington, U.S.A., 1945, 2s.)

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